ISSUE 424 | JUNE 2013

DRAGON®

A Dungeons & Dragons® Roleplaying Game Supplement

DRAGON®

CONTENTS

3 EDITORIAL: THINKING DRAGONS

By Steve Winter

When you look at a dragon, you instantly see its size and power. What you don't see but should be equally frightened of is its dark, inscrutable intelligence.

4 CATASTROPHIC DRAGONS

By Bruce Cordell and Ari Marmell

Only the most seasoned adventurers know about catastrophic dragons—and to know these creatures is to fear them. Meet the avalanche dragon and the typhoon dragon.

14 MARTEK AND THE DESERT OF DESOLATION

By Sterling Hershey

Ages ago, the wizard Martek bested and banished a mighty efreeti in a magical duel. To prevent its eventual escape, Martek set events into motion and awaited heroes who would be equal to his challenge.

20 ACHIEVEMENTS

By Robert J. Schwalb

Gold, magic items, jewels, and power are the traditional motivators that drive adventurers. A few seek medals, titles, and fame. This article explores a third category that we call achievements: connections, influence, information, and property.

34 THE DRAGON THAT NEVER DIED

By Ed Greenwood

The green dragon Aglaraerose sleeps atop the greatest treasure ever assembled in Faerûn—or so they say. Though thousands of treasure seekers have entered the dragon's mountain, only one ever emerged, and he told a tale that could hardly be believed.

ON THE COVER: *Coastal warriors surge out to sea to do battle against an awe-inspiring typhoon dragon as depicted by Zoltan Boros.*

DRAGON®

424

DRAGON | June 2013

Senior Producer	**Christopher Perkins**
Producers	**Greg Bilsland, Steve Winter**
Managing Editors	**Kim Mohan, Miranda Horner**
Development and Editing Lead	**Jeremy Crawford**
Developers	**Robert J. Schwalb, Chris Sims**
Senior Creative Director	**Jon Schindehette**
Art Director	**Kate Irwin**
Publishing Production Specialist	**Jessica Dubey**
Digital Studio Consultant	**Josh Dillard**
Contributing Authors	**Bruce Cordell, Ed Greenwood, Sterling Hershey, Ari Marmell, Robert J. Schwalb**
Contributing Editors	**Michele Carter, Scott Fitzgerald Gray, Michael G. Ryan, Penny Williams**
Contributing Artists	**Zoltan Boros, Wayne England, Tyler Jacobson, Ania Mohrbacher, Ryan Pancoast, Claudio Pozas, Chris Seaman**

Dungeons & Dragons, Wizards of the Coast, D&D Insider, their respective logos, D&D, *Dungeon*, and *Dragon* are trademarks of Wizards of the Coast LLC in the USA and other countries. ©2013 Wizards of the Coast LLC.

This material is protected under the copyright laws of the United States of America. Any reproduction or unauthorized use of the material or artwork contained herein is prohibited without the express written permission of Wizards of the Coast LLC. This product is a work of fiction. Any similarity to actual people, organizations, places, or events is purely coincidental.

Thinking Dragons

By Steve Winter

"*Noble dragons don't have friends. The nearest they can get to the idea is an enemy who is still alive.*"
Terry Pratchett, *Guards! Guards!*

You're never far from a dragon in D&D®. Perhaps that's more true in some campaigns, where a dragon lurks in every cave and behind every rock, than in others. Personally, I like my dragons rare and frightening. They might deign to talk to mere adventurers—for a while—but even a so-called "good" dragon weighs its morality on a different scale from the one we humans use.

It's all too easy to fall into the trap of believing that if nonhuman creatures think, they must think like us. We are, after all, the premier thinking creatures in the known universe.

Then again, the sample size in our survey of thinking creatures is aggravatingly small. Who's to say that the next thinking creature we run across won't have thoughts so alien that we can barely comprehend them? Who's to say that we haven't run across that creature already and failed to recognize its unfamiliar, possibly bizarre mental processes as thought?

In a world of fantasy, alienness is easy to picture when you're staring at an aboleth, a beholder, or some other aberrant creature. They have alien faces, so they must think alien thoughts. Dragons look like they might kill you if the conversation gets boring, but that's because they're *mean*, not because they're so very different from us.

But how could a dragon share our view of the world? Humans are small, fragile, and short-lived. Dragons truly are lords of all they survey, and their life *stages* are measured in centuries. Surely such a creature sees the world through a different lens.

The fact is, the two traits of dragons that would be most likely to drop you or me to our knees if we came face to face with a great wyrm—immense size and tremendous power—don't impress your typical D&D character all that much. But unfathomable, alien intelligence is frightening no matter what kind of package it comes in. Imbue your dragons with inscrutability, and they'll be accorded a whole new level of respect.

Speaking of respect, we can't close out this editorial without a respectful nod to the amazing career of Kim Mohan, who is retiring at the end of this month.

Kim took over as Editor-in-Chief of *The Dragon* with issue 49, in May 1981 (the same month that I started working for TSR). He filled that role with distinction from 1981 until 1986, and again from 1993 to 1995. He has also been editor of the *Amazing Stories* science fiction magazine and managing editor over the entire D&D product line since the early days of 3rd Edition.

In other words, if you've played Dungeons & Dragons® anytime in the last 30+ years, then you owe a big thank-you to Kim Mohan for helping to make D&D the great game it's always been—and that the next edition will be, because Kim has been up to his eyeballs in laying the groundwork for D&D Next, too. His attention to detail and to deadlines are legendary around the office, and his skilled eye, patience, and diligence will be sorely missed. Please join us in wishing him a long, fruitful, and justly earned retirement.

Bestiary: Catastrophic Dragons

Part 1

By Bruce Cordell and Ari Marmell

Illustrations by Zoltan Boros

Special thanks to Christopher Perkins and his conception of catastrophic dragon eggs.

Chromatic and metallic dragons are the stuff of legend throughout all lands and cultures. Even the common folk are familiar with the fiery ruin left behind after a red dragon attacks, or the stifling tyranny a gold dragon can impose in the name of its own righteous creed. All adventurers know that blue dragons breathe deadly lightning, and that silver dragons make better potential allies than their copper kin.

Only the most seasoned adventurers have heard of the catastrophic dragons—and those who know these creatures quickly learn to fear them.

Chromatic and metallic dragons are living creatures that draw on elemental energy. The catastrophic dragons are raw elemental energy given living form. They are the embodiment of elemental disasters, descended from ancient wyrms that turned away from Tiamat and Bahamut to embrace the power of the primordials during the Dawn War.

Catastrophic dragons are not living creatures with special abilities that reflect disasters. They are part

TM & © 2013 Wizards of the Coast LLC. All rights reserved.

of the environment in which they dwell, their mere presence spawning the catastrophes for which each dragon is named. The appearance of a catastrophic dragon is never anything other than an omen of death and disaster to come.

Current catastrophic dragon lore brings the number of distinct varieties to seven. The disasters they personify include the burying avalanche, the freezing blizzard, the shuddering earthquake, the ravenous tornado, the pounding typhoon, the explosive volcano, and the bone-charring wildfire.

In this issue of *Dragon*, we examine typhoon and avalanche dragons. Next month, in part 2 of this series, we'll meet wildfire and tornado dragons.

Origins

Catastrophic dragons first appeared during the Dawn War, following the death of Io. In reaction to the destruction of the dragon god, most of Io's children unleashed even more fury against the primordials. For some dragons, however, the fall of Io presaged that the gods were fated to lose the war.

These faithless dragons saw Tiamat and Bahamut as selfish exploiters of Io's legacy—weaklings who could not hope to stand against the forces that had cloven them from the fallen god's corpse. Instead of following the upstart dragon deities, these lost dragons eventually turned to—or were corrupted by—the power of the primordials.

The lords of chaos looked to these defectors as potential allies to their cause, and these primordials bestowed on them the gift of unrestrained elemental power. During the Dawn War, many catastrophic dragons served the primordials willingly, obliterating swaths of enemy soldiers—including other dragons—and even ravaging the gods' domains. Others sowed destruction for its own sake. When the primordials finally fell, the catastrophic dragons scattered themselves across the world and the planes.

Destruction and Rebirth

The process of transformation that created the catastrophic dragons involved prolonged exposure to extreme conditions of elemental power. Those dragons that survived the primordials' dark experiments were reborn as weapons honed to devastate the forces of the gods.

This drastic reconstitution of their physical forms engendered an equally traumatic change in the psyche of the catastrophic dragons. Consumed by elemental fury, their connection to the physical world was broken, forcing them to retreat into their own minds and lose touch with the war-torn world. In many cases, the primordials imbued the catastrophic dragons not just with elemental power but with their own festering hatred and madness.

CATASTROPHIC DRAGONS

The blizzard dragon, the earthquake dragon, and the volcanic dragon were introduced in *Monster Manual*® 3. This article introduces the avalanche dragon and the typhoon dragon. The tornado dragon and the wildfire dragon appear in next month's *Dragon* magazine, along with information on dragon life cycle and the deadly—and valuable—catastrophic dragon eggs.

Physiology

Catastrophic dragons resemble other kinds of dragons at first glance, but their embrace of primordial power makes them physically unique among dragonkind.

Catastrophic Traits

Catastrophic dragons have the general form of other kinds of dragons—a reptilian shape, great leathery wings, long necks, and taloned feet. These features are little more than the physical memory of a catastrophic dragon's form, though, and they serve as a conduit for the elemental power that each dragon manifests.

Catastrophic dragons are not composed of the living flesh of mortal creatures. They are made of animated elemental matter, given life by the ancient magic of their primordial patrons. Although they advance through the standard ages of all dragonkind, catastrophic dragons do not echo the life cycle of the metallic and chromatic dragons. They do not mate, they do not lay eggs in the traditional sense, and they do not brood over their young as do other dragons.

Individual catastrophic dragons might take on unique physical forms as a result of their power.

ELITE MONSTERS

Catastrophic dragons are elite monsters, which means that they are more powerful than a standard creature, but they are also reliant on allies. A brood of two or three catastrophic dragons of the same variety might be encountered in the midst of a great natural disaster. At other times, catastrophic dragons are encountered with lesser creatures—such as elementals or other monsters that share the dragon's affinity for destruction.

Dragons of storm might have multiple heads or a tail whose end rejoins its body. Dragons that embody the earth might have no limbs or wings, instead propelling themselves magically through the air in a form that mimics the elemental catastrophe they channel.

External Anatomy

Catastrophic dragons are raw elemental power barely constrained within a draconic shell. What appears to be the flesh and blood of their original forms is instead burning lava, howling snow, grinding stone, or unstoppable flames.

Catastrophic dragons whose forms incorporate fire or air have bodies that constantly flow with violent currents and shrieking elemental power. Such a dragon's body might be a sinuous, serpentine form one minute, and a towering embodiment of an elemental storm the next, its wings beating like a relentless tide. Dragons whose power is drawn from the earth can resemble a mass of rubble when quiescent, or a storm of fissured earth in the throes of destruction.

A catastrophic dragon does not have a breath weapon, but rather emanates destructive elemental energy from its entire body. As the elemental forces within the dragon intensify, this aura becomes stronger and influences a wider area. When this buildup peaks, it is dissipated in a powerful destructive wave.

CATASTROPHIC SCALES

Catastrophic dragons do not have skin protected by scales, as do true dragons. When a catastrophic dragon is injured, it sometimes sheds small fragments of its material essence—shards known as catastrophic scales. A catastrophic scale retains a measure of elemental essence, and it can be substituted for the alchemical reagents used as components in some rituals.

Internal Anatomy

Catastrophic dragons have no internal skeleton. Their forms are malleable, allowing them to meld into terrain that reflects their own elemental origin. Likewise, catastrophic dragons have no functioning internal organs, though they feature vestigial structures that reflect their living origins.

A creature that embodies shrieking wind, living fire, or crushing stone has no need for heart, lungs, or stomach. Likewise, catastrophic dragons retain only the secondary characteristics of male and female dragons—a massive build, a colorful crest, or some other vestigial gender identification. All catastrophic dragons reproduce by way of raw elemental power, and they feature no true gender differences between them.

Even without a physical brain, catastrophic dragons are as intelligent as their metallic and chromatic kin, though they are governed more by passion than by rationality. As creatures of raw chaos, catastrophic dragons each contain a fragment of elemental essence that traces back to the primordials that created them, and this essence provides so many elemental creatures with sentience.

Metabolism

As beings of elemental power, catastrophic dragons have no need to eat. They draw sustenance directly from their surroundings, imbuing chaos into the material world and creating hazards as they do so. As a dragon's destructive aura strengthens, so too does its elemental feeding. Although a triumphant dragon might devour fallen foes out of instinct, the elemental forces within the dragon disintegrate such victims, rather than digesting them.

Catastrophic dragons are more inclined to consume magic items than natural dragons are, since their chaotic elemental composition lends itself to the destruction and conversion of magical power. See *Draconomicon™: Chromatic Dragons* for more information on dragons consuming magic items.

Quiescence

Catastrophic dragons need no sleep, since they are not mortal creatures. Like natural dragons, though, they engage in long periods of inactivity. Catastrophic dragons such as blizzard or wildfire dragons embody the cycles of catastrophic weather, flaring into violence in the appropriate season and growing quiescent at other times. Others are less predictable, especially those imbued with the power of storms or violent upheaval. People living close to a catastrophic dragon encourage long periods of quiescence by appeasing the creature with gifts and sacrifices. In the case of a more intransigent dragon, shamans or spellcasters might lead rituals to encourage dormancy and suppress the creature's violent inclinations.

During quiescence, a catastrophic dragon's elemental forces are at a low ebb, but will slowly build in intensity. At the peak of its inactivity, a dragon remains dormant even as its power intensifies seasonal elemental effects or produces small-scale storms and tremors. Then the slow buildup of power begins anew.

At key times (especially when disturbed or attacked), a catastrophic dragon shakes off its quiescence all at once to accelerate the buildup of its power. Its deadly aura of elemental energy intensifies in an instant to produce localized bursts of destruction. Depending on the nature and outcome of a battle, a catastrophic dragon that draws on the full extent of its elemental power falls back to a period of deep quiescence in the aftermath.

Avalanche Dragon

"I've seen plenty of rock slides down this pass, but one I won't ever forget. I saw something dance in the crushing boulders. I saw a dragon with wings of stone, coming for me. It haunts my dreams."

–Jak Ironwheel, caravan guard

The rolling boom of falling rocks ricochets down the pass like the lament of a brutal wind, distant but drawing closer. The echoes of crashing boulders accumulate, growing in intensity. In a deafening flood of smothering debris, the avalanche hurtles downward—and in its dance of crushing stones, the image of a dragon writhes. Its wings are the vanguard of the pounding stone. Its voice is the bellow of suffocating rock, its lashing tail the enveloping pall of dust that settles like a shroud on all those in its path.

Avalanche dragons are known as "deathslide dragons" to mountain orc tribes, and as "smothering dragons" to the goliaths that live below the peaks where they lair. An elemental accumulation of jagged stone shards and blinding dust, an avalanche dragon shows its draconic form only in broad outline. Its wings are twin clouds of dust and glittering sand. Its eyes, fangs, and claws are crystal shards, flashing with static discharge. An avalanche dragon is constantly shrouded in a shifting mass of stone and rock, the sound of which cracks and booms whenever it wakes from its watchful quiescence.

Lore

Arcana DC 25: Few creatures hold grudges as long and as well as an avalanche dragon. These monsters forget no slight—either to themselves or to their lineage, which stretches back to Io's demise. Rather than blaming Io's fall on Erek-Hus, the primordial that slew him, a subset of the dragon god's children held the power of death itself responsible for stealing their lord. These dragons retreated into the Elemental Chaos in pain and confusion, where a primordial named Athuam the Falling Sky found them.

Having suffered recent defeat in battle with Nerull, the original god of the dead, Athuam saw in the dragons a means to shape his vengeance. The primordial convinced the dragons that if death itself could be destroyed, all creatures that died would be returned to life—including their fallen god.

As one, the dragons vowed to make Athuam their new lord if he would lead them to destroy Nerull. The primordial made them drink of his own muddy blood, which infused the dragons' veins with a mineral strength and elemental vitality that hardened their flesh and minds. They became catastrophic dragons of the avalanche, channeling the power of the crumbling mountain.

The dragons transformed by Athuam accompanied the Falling Sky on his next attack against Nerull in his realm of Pluton. There, Athuam and his crush of avalanche dragons cut a swath of destruction across the astral domain, severely depleting the god of death's strength. By calling on his divine allies, Nerull threw down and entrapped Athuam, along with most of the primordial's catastrophic dragon allies.

Avalanche dragons that escaped the battle are the ancestors from which all avalanche dragons of the present day descend. More so than other catastrophic dragons, avalanche dragons maintain a connection to their ancient history. Over long generations, their enmity for the dead god Nerull has been reshaped as a natural instinct to destroy the creatures and servants of shadow.

Encounters

In the high places of the world, avalanche dragons perch together in rest, contemplating the natural beauty around them. These monsters are content to remain inactive for long periods, during which time they make alliances with the creatures of the

trackless mountains, including dire bears and wolves, bulettes, goliaths, drakes, and wyverns.

Avalanche dragons openly ally with other kinds of catastrophic dragons, especially the earthquake and volcanic dragons with whom they feel a natural kinship. Avalanche dragons might come together under the leadership of a creature other than a catastrophic dragon, especially if that individual channels elemental power.

Good-aligned creatures that learn the lore of the avalanche dragons' creation sometimes seek alliances dedicated to destroying the undead and the forces of shadow. These creatures learn to their sorrow that catastrophic dragons can never truly be controlled. Such alliances too often fail in the heat of final battle, when an avalanche dragon's rage causes it to lash out in a destructive fury that slays friend and foe alike.

Avalanche Dragons in Combat

Avalanche dragons delight in hurling themselves down on their foes from great heights, then moving through melee amid the rain of their own aura of falling stones. They assault powerful opponents directly with melee attacks, while smothering other foes with a storm of deadly rock and dust. Despite being swift flyers, avalanche dragons rarely fight from the air. Instead, they fly from point to point around the battlefield, choosing the best spots to rain death down on their enemies.

When an avalanche dragon chooses a victim from among several possible targets, it focuses on undead foes, creatures of the Shadowfell, and those that use the shadow power source. An avalanche dragon is sometimes sympathetic to the foes of undead and shadow, and might pause in its tumbling path to parley with such creatures. Short-term alliances can be gained by creatures that offer the dragon knowledge of a Shadowfell threat it was not previously aware of, or an opportunity to strike a blow against powerful undead.

Avalanche dragons also hold grudges, which can affect their judgment and tactics in combat. An avalanche dragon invariably targets creatures that have fought or inconvenienced it in the past—or that remind it of past grievances. In other cases, however, an avalanche dragon is an equal-opportunity combatant, allowing its elemental nature to run wild as it creates as much chaos and devastation as it can. When avalanche dragons fight together, they are particularly potent, coordinating their auras and attacks to scour the battlefield.

Environs and Lair

Avalanche dragons dwell in the highest points of the natural world, drawn to hidden places on mountain slopes, the tops of steep hills, or the peaks of ruined towers. Some lair on volcano calderas, allying themselves with the volcanic dragons that also dwell there.

Avalanche dragons spend considerable time outside their lairs, which are mostly used for storing the dragon's treasures. An avalanche dragon's preferred resting place is the slope or peak above its lair, from which it gazes out while taking its rest. As such, avalanche dragons can easily share their lairs with earthquake dragons and other catastrophic dragons. Some share lairs with chromatic and metallic dragons, particularly the blue dragons that dwell in the mountains of remote deserts.

Though they avoid large centers of civilization, avalanche dragons love to lair between such settlements, lingering along the trade routes that connect cities and larger towns. In this way, broods of avalanche dragons can launch ambushes in the mountain passes, targeting caravans containing mineral wealth or magic. On the few occasions that avalanche dragons are found near civilization, it is usually the presence of powerful undead that draws them there.

Personality and Motivation

No catastrophic dragon can be said to embody a true sense of balance or serenity. Avalanche dragons sometimes come close. Though they delight in the crashing roar of the landslide and in burying prey beneath mountains of stony debris, avalanche dragons also enjoy long periods of rest. During such times, they take in the view of surrounding lands from above their lairs, content to watch and dream for months or years at a time.

Avalanche dragons are well known for their long memories. All possess at least a faint recollection of the resounding defeat the first avalanche dragons suffered at the hands of Nerull, the god of death deposed and replaced by the Raven Queen. Thanks to their particular history, avalanche dragons are most easily stirred from their quiescence by the presence of undead, or by creatures that have dealings with the Shadowfell and the shadow power source.

Each avalanche dragon keeps a personal list of more recent offenses—and the individual vindications they dream of enacting in response. Some are irate with dwarves whose mines run too close to the hilltops and mountains where avalanche dragons lair. Others become infuriated by the ego of nearby chromatic or metallic dragons. Some can be counted on to envy the good fortune of nearby humanoid communities. And all are flexible enough in their thinking that they can transfer a grudge held against one creature to include any and all of that creature's allies, companions, or descendants.

Avalanche Dragon Wyrmling Level 2 Skirmisher
Medium elemental magical beast (dragon, earth) XP 125

HP 38; **Bloodied** 19 **Initiative** +5
AC 16, **Fortitude** 15, **Reflex** 14, **Will** 13 **Perception** +2
Speed 6 (earth walk), fly 6 Darkvision, tremorsense 5

Traits

☼ **Rain of Stone ✦ Aura** 1
Any enemy that ends its turn in the aura takes 5 damage.

Landslide
Being slowed affects only the dragon's fly speed.

Standard Actions

⊕ **Claw ✦ At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +7 vs. AC
Hit: 2d4 + 4 damage, and the target falls prone.

⸸ **Avalanche Trample ✦ Recharge** ⚄ ⚅
Effect: The dragon moves up to its speed, and it can move through enemies' spaces. If an enemy within 1 square of the dragon hits it with an attack during this movement, the dragon uses *claw* against that enemy. Each time the dragon enters an enemy's space for the first time during this movement, it uses *claw* against that enemy.

Minor Actions

✧ **Blinding Dust** (zone) **✦ Encounter**
Effect: Close burst 2; the burst creates a zone that lasts until the end of the dragon's next turn. The zone is heavily obscured.

Str 17 (+4)	**Dex** 15 (+3)	**Wis** 13 (+2)
Con 14 (+3)	**Int** 10 (+1)	**Cha** 11 (+1)

Alignment unaligned **Languages** Draconic, Primordial

Young Avalanche Dragon Level 7 Elite Skirmisher
Large elemental magical beast (dragon, earth) XP 600

HP 164; **Bloodied** 82 **Initiative** +9
AC 21, **Fortitude** 20, **Reflex** 19, **Will** 18 **Perception** +6
Speed 7 (earth walk), fly 7 Darkvision, tremorsense 5
Saving Throws +2; **Action Points** 1

Traits

☼ **Rain of Stone ✦ Aura** 1
Any enemy that ends its turn in the aura takes 5 damage.

Landslide
Being slowed affects only the dragon's fly speed.

Standard Actions

⊕ **Claw ✦ At-Will**
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +12 vs. AC
Hit: 2d6 + 8 damage, and the target falls prone.

⸸ **Avalanche Trample ✦ At-Will**
Effect: The dragon moves up to its speed, and it can move through enemies' spaces. If an enemy within 2 squares of the dragon hits it with an attack during this movement, the dragon uses *claw* against that enemy. Each time the dragon enters an enemy's space for the first time during this movement, it uses *claw* against that enemy.

Minor Actions

✧ **Blinding Dust** (zone) **✦ Recharge** when first bloodied
Effect: Close burst 2; the burst creates a zone that lasts until the end of the dragon's next turn. The zone is heavily obscured.

Expanding Aura ✦ Recharge when the dragon starts its turn and its *rain of stone* is smaller than aura 5
Effect: The *rain of stone* aura expands by 2 squares.

✧ **Smashing Stone ✦ Recharge** when the dragon starts its turn and its *rain of stone* is aura 5
Attack: Close burst 5 (enemies in the burst); +10 vs. Reflex
Hit: 1d6 + 7 damage, and the target falls prone. The target also takes ongoing 5 damage and cannot stand up (save ends both).
Effect: The dragon's *rain of stone* reverts to aura 1.

Str 20 (+8)	**Dex** 18 (+7)	**Wis** 17 (+6)
Con 18 (+7)	**Int** 15 (+5)	**Cha** 17 (+6)

Alignment unaligned **Languages** Common, Draconic, Primordial

Adult Avalanche Dragon Level 12 Elite Skirmisher
Large elemental magical beast (dragon, earth) XP 1,400

HP 248; **Bloodied** 124 **Initiative** +13
AC 26, **Fortitude** 25, **Reflex** 24, **Will** 23 **Perception** +11
Speed 8 (earth walk), fly 8 Darkvision, tremorsense 5
Saving Throws +2; **Action Points** 1

Traits

☼ **Rain of Stone ✦ Aura** 1
Any enemy that ends its turn in the aura takes 10 damage.

Landslide
Being slowed affects only the dragon's fly speed.

Standard Actions

⊕ **Claw ✦ At-Will**
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +17 vs. AC
Hit: 2d6 + 12 damage, and the target falls prone.

⸸ **Avalanche Trample ✦ At-Will**
Effect: The dragon moves up to its speed, and it can move through enemies' spaces. If an enemy within 2 squares of the dragon hits it with an attack during this movement, the dragon uses *claw* against that enemy. Each time the dragon enters an enemy's space for the first time during this movement, it uses *claw* against that enemy.

Minor Actions

✧ **Blinding Dust** (zone) **✦ Recharge** when first bloodied
Effect: Close burst 2; the burst creates a zone that lasts until the end of the dragon's next turn. The zone is heavily obscured.

Expanding Aura ✦ Recharge when the dragon starts its turn and its *rain of stone* is smaller than aura 5
Effect: The *rain of stone* aura expands by 2 squares.

✧ **Smashing Stone ✦ Recharge** when the dragon starts its turn and its *rain of stone* is aura 5
Attack: Close burst 5 (enemies in the burst); +15 vs. Reflex
Hit: 1d6 + 11 damage, and the target falls prone. The target also takes ongoing 10 damage and cannot stand up (save ends both).
Effect: The dragon's *rain of stone* reverts to aura 1.

Str 23 (+12)	**Dex** 21 (+11)	**Wis** 20 (+11)
Con 20 (+11)	**Int** 17 (+9)	**Cha** 19 (+10)

Alignment unaligned **Languages** Common, Draconic, Primordial

Elder Avalanche Dragon Level 17 Elite Skirmisher
Huge elemental magical beast (dragon, earth) XP 3,200

HP 332; **Bloodied** 166 **Initiative** +16
AC 31, **Fortitude** 30, **Reflex** 29, **Will** 28 **Perception** +14
Speed 8 (earth walk), fly 8 Darkvision, tremorsense 5
Saving Throws +2; **Action Points** 1

Traits

☼ **Rain of Stone ✦ Aura** 1
Any enemy that ends its turn in the aura takes 10 damage.

Landslide
Being slowed affects only the dragon's fly speed.

Standard Actions

⨁ **Claw ✦ At-Will**
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +22 vs. AC
Hit: 2d8 + 16 damage, and the target falls prone.

⸸ **Avalanche Trample ✦ At-Will**
Effect: The dragon moves up to its speed, and it can move through enemies' spaces. If an enemy within 2 squares of the dragon hits it with an attack during this movement, the dragon uses *claw* against that enemy. Each time the dragon enters an enemy's space for the first time during this movement, it uses *claw* against that enemy.

Minor Actions

✧ **Blinding Dust** (zone) **✦ Recharge** when first bloodied
Effect: Close burst 2; the burst creates a zone that lasts until the end of the dragon's next turn. The zone is heavily obscured.

Expanding Aura ✦ Recharge when the dragon starts its turn and its *rain of stone* is smaller than aura 5
Effect: The *rain of stone* aura expands by 2 squares.

✧ **Smashing Stone ✦ Recharge** when the dragon starts its turn and its *rain of stone* is aura 5
Attack: Close burst 5 (enemies in the burst); +20 vs. Reflex
Hit: 1d8 + 14 damage, and the target falls prone. The target also takes ongoing 10 damage and cannot stand up (save ends both).
Effect: The dragon's *rain of stone* reverts to aura 1.

Str 26 (+16) **Dex** 23 (+14) **Wis** 22 (+14)
Con 22 (+14) **Int** 19 (+12) **Cha** 21 (+13)
Alignment unaligned **Languages** Common, Draconic, Primordial

Ancient Avalanche Dragon Level 22 Elite Skirmisher
Huge elemental magical beast (dragon, earth) XP 8,300

HP 418; **Bloodied** 209 **Initiative** +21
AC 36, **Fortitude** 35, **Reflex** 34, **Will** 33 **Perception** +18
Speed 8 (earth walk), fly 8 Darkvision, tremorsense 5
Saving Throws +2; **Action Points** 1

Traits

☼ **Rain of Stone ✦ Aura** 1
Any enemy that ends its turn in the aura takes 15 damage.

Landslide
Being slowed affects only the dragon's fly speed.

Standard Actions

⨁ **Claw ✦ At-Will**
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +27 vs. AC
Hit: 2d10 + 20 damage, and the target falls prone.

⸸ **Avalanche Trample ✦ At-Will**
Effect: The dragon moves up to its speed, and it can move through enemies' spaces. If an enemy within 2 squares of the dragon hits it with an attack during this movement, the dragon uses *claw* against that enemy. Each time the dragon enters an enemy's space for the first time during this movement, it uses *claw* against that enemy.

↷ **Spit Boulders ✦ At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 10 (one or two creatures); +27 vs. AC
Hit: 2d12 + 18 damage, and the target falls prone.

Minor Actions

✧ **Blinding Dust** (zone) **✦ Recharge** when first bloodied
Effect: Close burst 2; the burst creates a zone that lasts until the end of the dragon's next turn. The zone is heavily obscured.

Expanding Aura ✦ Recharge when the dragon starts its turn and its *rain of stone* is smaller than aura 5
Effect: The *rain of stone* aura expands by 2 squares.

✧ **Smashing Stone ✦ Recharge** when the dragon starts its turn and its *rain of stone* is aura 5
Attack: Close burst 5 (enemies in the burst); +25 vs. Reflex
Hit: 1d8 + 18 damage, and the target falls prone. The target also takes ongoing 10 damage and cannot stand up (save ends both).
Effect: The dragon's *rain of stone* reverts to aura 1.

Str 29 (+20) **Dex** 26 (+19) **Wis** 25 (+18)
Con 25 (+18) **Int** 22 (+17) **Cha** 23 (+17)
Alignment unaligned **Languages** Common, Draconic, Primordial

Typhoon Dragon

"Typhoon dragon? Pshaw. I've faced down fire-breathers, poison-spitters, beasts of the frozen tundra. What's a little rain going to–"

–Last words of Kaltho Vadarris, dragon slayer

As insatiable and capricious as the sea and its storms, the typhoon dragon is a harbinger of destruction. It delights in carnage, leaving death and mayhem in its wake. Like the hurricane, its approach is always forewarned–and as with those caught in the path of a hurricane, that warning avails its victims little. Where a typhoon dragon appears, nothing remains but wind-scoured coastline, the shattered remains of settlements, and the bones of the dead scattered across the uncaring sands.

The typhoon dragon has a sinuous and clearly draconic shape, but its substance is strangely fluid. Seen close up, a typhoon dragon appears to be formed of water held in place by unseen forces. Where the flesh of other creatures might stretch or wrinkle as they move, the typhoon dragon's joints and spines ripple like the liquid they are.

Lore

Arcana DC 25: When Bahamut and Tiamat arose from the sundered corpse of Io, a handful of dragons were driven to devastating rage by their god's demise. Turning their backs on their own kind and the dragons' role in the Dawn War, they engaged in unbridled destruction for its own sake. At this time, the great oceans of the world were not yet claimed and ruled over by the higher powers. Many of these dragons gravitated there, attracted to the sea's chaotic and unforgiving nature.

Over time, as Melora began to exert control over the oceans, these dragons saw their freedom threatened. Turning to the powers that opposed Melora, they paid fealty to a number of primordials. Of these,

only the name of Solkara, the Crushing Wave, is recorded. The primordials submerged these dragons in the seas of the Elemental Chaos, holding them there until the pressure had crushed them and their waterlogged flesh had sloughed from their bones. What remained, Solkara hurled upward into the fearsome storms that scoured the elemental skies.

Given a semblance of life by flashing lightning and fearsome winds, the first typhoon dragons were born. Freed by Solkara as tools of chaos, these harbingers of the storm expanded their destructive ways, fighting all creatures in the name of their need to destroy.

Encounters

Typhoon dragons cooperate with any creature that shares their environment and can augment the dragons' destructive urges with its own. The territories of blizzard and tornado dragons often overlap the typhoon dragon's coastal realms. Particularly violent blue dragons also make viable allies, as do storm giants and all manner of elementals. Few sights are as horrifying as the approach of a storm that walks (an abomination detailed in *The Plane Below*) accompanied by one or more typhoon dragons swirling within its dark clouds.

Typhoon dragons also ally with creatures of the sea, from fearsome beasts such as dragon eels (*Draconomicon: Chromatic Dragons)* to kuo-toas and other aquatic humanoids. Unlike other catastrophic dragons, typhoon dragons have no particular aversion to worshipers of the gods. As such, cults of Melora (or sahuagin cults of her exarch Sekolah) worship typhoon dragons as embodiments of the sea's wrath.

A typhoon dragon's alliances are always temporary, however, held together only by the creature's delight in ever more widespread devastation. Eventually, the dragon's lust to destroy supersedes its patience for lesser creatures—or its instinct to defer to allies more powerful than itself.

Typhoon Dragons in Combat

A typhoon dragon is surrounded by the pounding rains and shifting winds generated by its elemental nature. Though equally at home on land, in the sea, or in the air, these creatures prefer to unleash their destructive urges at the coastal interface between air, water, and land. A typhoon dragon counts on its elemental fury to make it difficult for foes to flee from it—and it enjoys watching the pathetic creatures try.

Typhoon dragons take such delight in crushing their foes that they deliberately target weaker creatures, even if that means letting more dangerous opponents survive to fight on. They are temperamental creatures, however, and might turn their wrath on a foe that hurts them in a particularly dramatic fashion. Though it is highly intelligent, a typhoon dragon has emotional impulses that make it a relatively poor tactical fighter. As such, characters with experience fighting these creatures have learned to make a dragon constantly shift its attention rather than focus on a single target.

Typhoon dragons are intensely and unpredictably curious (see "Personality and Motivation," below). This curiosity provides a potential benefit only in delaying an attack. After combat has begun, something that piques the dragon's curiosity isn't likely to dissuade it from continuing. The creature simply makes a mental note to look into it after it has slaughtered everything in sight.

Environs and Lair

Typhoon dragons make their lairs both underwater and on land. Beneath the waves, they prefer oceanic trenches or the caves of undersea mountains. Above, they favor coastal cave complexes, the peaks of storm-cloaked mountains, or monsoon-drenched isles.

Typhoon dragons compete for surface lairs with blue dragons, which favor similar environments. Though the typhoon dragons often have the advantage of numbers, the more powerful blue dragon usually comes out ahead when these creatures clash. As such, typhoon dragons typically lair underwater in areas where blue dragons are common.

As with other catastrophic dragons, typhoon dragons prefer to lair near bastions of civilization, so that their own depredations—as well as the cyclical storms their presence encourages—have the potential for maximum devastation.

Personality and Motivation

Typhoon dragons are wantonly destructive—the embodiment of the storm and the worst ravages of the sea. They are possessed of a short and murderous temper, but the fact that they kill indiscriminately makes that temper incidental. A typhoon dragon delights in destruction for its own sake, seeing the devastation left behind after the most terrible storms as a thing of beauty—and a design to be emulated whenever possible.

The mercurial nature of the sea manifests in these otherwise pure engines of destruction as an insatiable and unpredictable curiosity. A typhoon dragon might grow fascinated with something as unique as an undersea ruin in its territory, or as mundane as a victim speaking with a peculiar accent while begging for mercy. An unusual piece of jewelry, an unfamiliar race, a snippet of half-heard lore, or a peculiar cultural tradition—any of these things can grab a typhoon dragon's attention.

This curiosity could pass in a few questions. Or the dragon could abandon short-term goals in favor of learning everything it can regarding its new fascination. This curiosity inspires typhoon dragons to become collectors of eccentricities, from sahuagin art to religious writings, locks of hair, animal carapaces, or broken bits of sunken ships.

Typhoon Dragon Wyrmling Level 4 Brute
Medium elemental magical beast (air, dragon) XP 175

HP 64; **Bloodied** 32 **Initiative** +6
AC 16, **Fortitude** 16, **Reflex** 16, **Will** 15 **Perception** +4
Speed 6, fly 6 (hover), swim 6 Darkvision

Traits

☼ **Grasping Winds ✦ Aura** 1
The aura is difficult terrain, and enemies in it cannot shift.

Standard Actions

⊕ **Bite** (lightning) **✦ At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +9 vs. AC
Hit: 2d4 + 5 damage, and ongoing 5 lightning damage (save ends).

⊕ **Claws ✦ At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +9 vs. AC
Hit: 2d8 + 6 damage, and the target falls prone.

⸸ **Wyrmling Fury ✦ Recharge** ⚄ ⁞⁞
Requirement: The dragon must be bloodied.
Effect: The dragon uses *bite* and *claws*.

Triggered Actions

Storm Coil (lightning, thunder) **✦ At-Will**
Trigger: The dragon takes lightning or thunder damage.
Effect (Free Action): Each enemy in the dragon's aura takes 5 damage of the triggering type.

Str 16 (+5) **Dex** 18 (+6) **Wis** 15 (+4)
Con 14 (+4) **Int** 11 (+2) **Cha** 11 (+2)
Alignment chaotic evil **Languages** Draconic, Primordial

Young Typhoon Dragon Level 9 Elite Brute
Large elemental magical beast (air, dragon) XP 800

HP 236; **Bloodied** 118 **Initiative** +9
AC 21, **Fortitude** 21, **Reflex** 21, **Will** 20 **Perception** +7
Speed 8, fly 8 (hover), swim 8 Darkvision
Saving Throws +2; **Action Points** 1

Traits

☼ **Grasping Winds ✦ Aura** 1
The aura is difficult terrain, and enemies in it cannot shift.

Standard Actions

⊕ **Bite** (lightning) **✦ At-Will**
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +14 vs. AC
Hit: 2d6 + 9 damage, and ongoing 5 lightning damage (save ends).

⊕ **Claw ✦ At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +14 vs. AC
Hit: 3d6 + 9 damage, and the target falls prone.

⸸ **Double Attack ✦ At-Will**
Effect: The dragon uses *bite* and *claw* or uses *claw* twice.

Minor Actions

Expanding Aura ✦ Recharge when the dragon starts its turn and its *grasping winds* is smaller than aura 5
Effect: The *grasping winds* aura expands by 2 squares.

↭ **Raging Storm** (lightning, thunder) **✦ Recharge** at the start of any turn when its *grasping winds* is aura 5
Attack: Close burst 5 (enemies in the burst); +12 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 2d6 + 8 thunder damage, ongoing 5 lightning damage (save ends), and the dragon slides the target up to 2 squares.
Effect: The dragon's *grasping winds* reverts to aura 1.

Triggered Actions

Storm Coil (lightning, thunder) **✦ At-Will**
Trigger: The dragon takes lightning or thunder damage.
Effect (Free Action): Each enemy in the dragon's aura takes 5 damage of the triggering type and grants combat advantage until the end of the dragon's next turn.

Str 19 (+8) **Dex** 21 (+9) **Wis** 17 (+7)
Con 18 (+8) **Int** 14 (+6) **Cha** 15 (+6)
Alignment chaotic evil **Languages** Common, Draconic, Primordial

Adult Typhoon Dragon Level 14 Elite Brute
Large elemental magical beast (air, dragon) XP 2,000

HP 340; **Bloodied** 170 **Initiative** +14
AC 27, **Fortitude** 26, **Reflex** 27, **Will** 25 **Perception** +12
Speed 8, fly 8 (hover), swim 8 Darkvision
Saving Throws +2; **Action Points** 1

Traits

☼ **Grasping Winds ✦ Aura** 1
The aura is difficult terrain, and enemies in it cannot shift.

Standard Actions

⊕ **Bite** (lightning) **✦ At-Will**
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +19 vs. AC
Hit: 2d8 + 14 damage, and ongoing 5 lightning damage (save ends).

⊕ **Claw ✦ At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +19 vs. AC
Hit: 3d8 + 14 damage, and the target falls prone.

⸸ **Double Attack ✦ At-Will**
Effect: The dragon uses *bite* and *claw* or uses *claw* twice.

Minor Actions

Expanding Aura ✦ Recharge when the dragon starts its turn and its *grasping winds* is smaller than aura 5
Effect: The *grasping winds* aura expands by 2 squares.

↭ **Raging Storm** (lightning, thunder) **✦ Recharge** at the start of any turn when its *grasping winds* is aura 5
Attack: Close burst 5 (enemies in the burst); +17 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 2d6 + 12 thunder damage, ongoing 10 lightning damage (save ends), and the dragon slides the target up to 2 squares.
Effect: The dragon's *grasping winds* reverts to aura 1.

Triggered Actions

Storm Coil (lightning, thunder) **✦ At-Will**
Trigger: The dragon takes lightning or thunder damage.
Effect (Free Action): Each enemy in the dragon's aura takes 10 damage of the triggering type and grants combat advantage until the end of the dragon's next turn.

Str 22 (+13) **Dex** 24 (+14) **Wis** 21 (+12)
Con 20 (+12) **Int** 17 (+10) **Cha** 19 (+11)
Alignment chaotic evil **Languages** Common, Draconic, Primordial

Elder Typhoon Dragon Level 19 Elite Brute
Huge elemental magical beast (air, dragon) XP 4,800

HP 448; **Bloodied** 224 **Initiative** +17
AC 32, **Fortitude** 31, **Reflex** 32, **Will** 30 **Perception** +15
Speed 10, fly 10 (hover), swim 10 Darkvision
Saving Throws +2; **Action Points** 1

Traits

☼ **Grasping Winds ✦ Aura** 1
The aura is difficult terrain, and enemies in it cannot shift.

Standard Actions

⨺ **Bite** (lightning) **✦ At-Will**
Attack: Melee 3 (one creature); +24 vs. AC
Hit: 3d10 + 8 damage, and ongoing 10 lightning damage (save ends).

⨺ **Claw ✦ At-Will**
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +24 vs. AC
Hit: 3d10 + 16 damage, and the target falls prone.

⨺ **Double Attack ✦ At-Will**
Effect: The dragon uses *bite* and *claw* or uses *claw* twice.

Minor Actions

Expanding Aura ✦ Recharge when the dragon starts its turn and its *grasping winds* is smaller than aura 5
Effect: The *grasping winds* aura expands by 2 squares.

Raging Storm (lightning, thunder) **✦ Recharge** at the start of any turn when its *grasping winds* is aura 5
Attack: Close burst 5 (enemies in the burst); +22 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 2d8 + 16 thunder damage, ongoing 10 lightning damage (save ends), and the dragon slides the target up to 3 squares.
Effect: The dragon's *grasping winds* reverts to aura 1.

Triggered Actions

Storm Coil (lightning, thunder) **✦ At-Will**
Trigger: The dragon takes lightning or thunder damage.
Effect (Free Action): Each enemy in the dragon's aura takes 15 damage of the triggering type and grants combat advantage until the end of the dragon's next turn.

Str 25 (+16)	**Dex** 27 (+17)	**Wis** 23 (+15)
Con 24 (+16)	**Int** 21 (+14)	**Cha** 21 (+14)

Alignment chaotic evil **Languages** Common, Draconic, Primordial

Ancient Typhoon Dragon Level 24 Elite Brute
Huge elemental magical beast (air, dragon) XP 12,100

HP 552; **Bloodied** 276 **Initiative** +22
AC 37, **Fortitude** 36, **Reflex** 37, **Will** 35 **Perception** +19
Speed 10, fly 10 (hover), swim 10 Darkvision
Saving Throws +2; **Action Points** 1

Traits

☼ **Grasping Winds ✦ Aura** 1
The aura is difficult terrain, and enemies in it cannot shift.

Standard Actions

⨺ **Bite** (lightning) **✦ At-Will**
Attack: Melee 3 (one creature); +29 vs. AC
Hit: 3d10 + 10 damage, and ongoing 15 lightning damage (save ends).

⨺ **Claw ✦ At-Will**
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +29 vs. AC
Hit: 3d12 + 22 damage, and the target falls prone.

⨺ **Double Attack ✦ At-Will**
Effect: The dragon uses *bite* and *claw* or uses *claw* twice.

Minor Actions

Expanding Aura ✦ Recharge when the dragon starts its turn and its *grasping winds* is smaller than aura 5
Effect: The *grasping winds* aura expands by 2 squares.

Raging Storm (lightning, thunder) **✦ Recharge** at the start of any turn when its *grasping winds* is aura 5
Attack: Close burst 5 (enemies in the burst); +27 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 2d8 + 20 thunder damage, ongoing 15 lightning damage (save ends), and the dragon slides the target up to 4 squares.
Effect: The dragon's *grasping winds* reverts to aura 1.

Cyclone's Pull ✦ Recharge ⚄ ⚅
Attack: Close blast 5 (creatures in the blast); +27 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 3d8 + 8 damage, and the dragon pulls the target up to 4 squares.

Triggered Actions

Storm Coil (lightning, thunder) **✦ At-Will**
Trigger: The dragon takes lightning or thunder damage.
Effect (Free Action): Each enemy in the dragon's aura takes 20 damage of the triggering type and grants combat advantage until the end of the dragon's next turn.

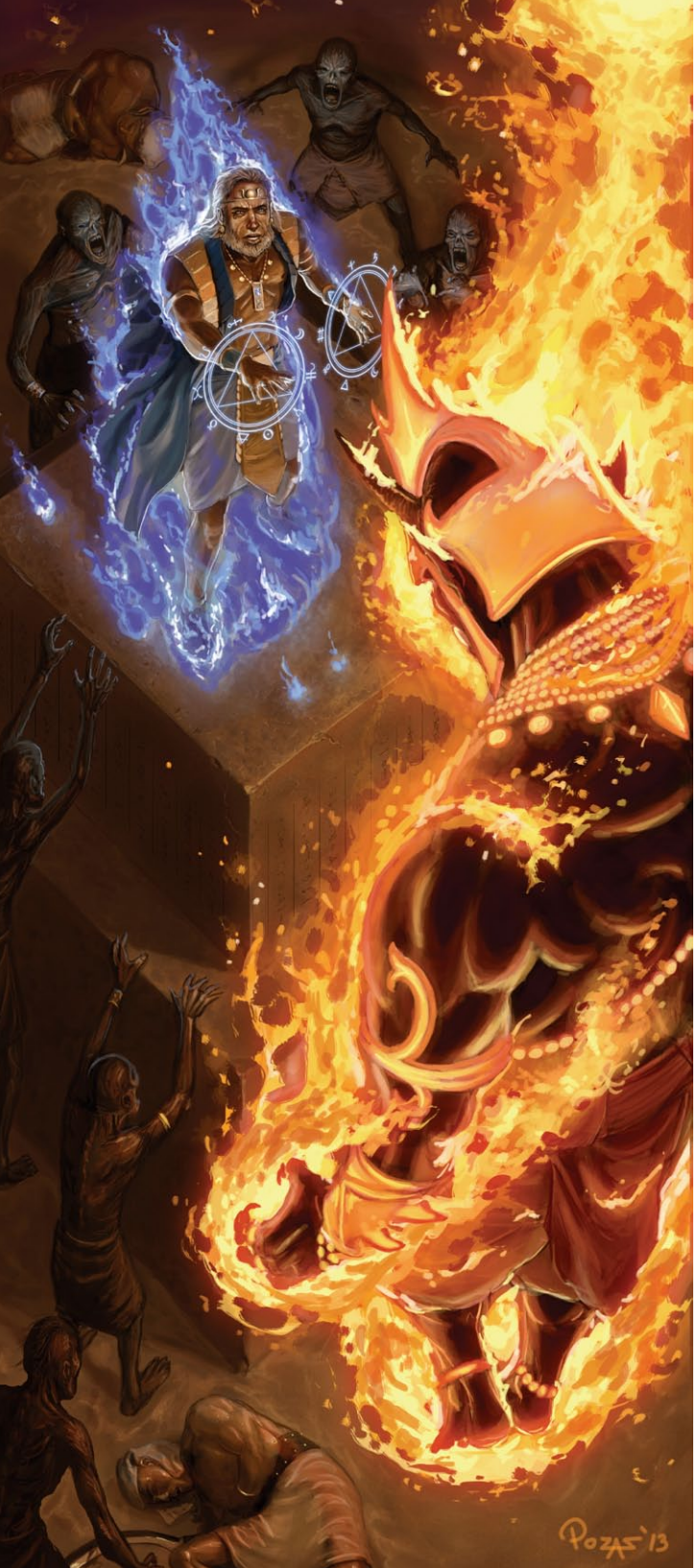
Str 28 (+21)	**Dex** 30 (+22)	**Wis** 25 (+19)
Con 26 (+20)	**Int** 23 (+18)	**Cha** 23 (+18)

Alignment chaotic evil **Languages** Common, Draconic, Primordial

About the Authors

Bruce R.Cordell is an Origins and ENnie award-winning author whose list of professional game credits include *The Gates of Firestorm Peak*, *Return to the Tomb of Horrors*, *The Sunless Citadel*, and D&D® Gamma World™ (2010 edition). Bruce's novel credits include *Darkvision*, *Plague of Spells*, *Sword of the Gods*, and *Spinner of Lies*. His latest project is as a designer on D&D Next. You can find out more about Bruce at brucecordell.com.

Ari Marmell has been an avid Dungeons & Dragons® player since he was nine years old, and an avid D&D freelancer for about nine years. (Note the symmetry.) Currently, he works primarily as an author of fiction, such as *Darksiders: the Abomination Vault* from Del Rey, and the Widdershins fantasy series from Pyr Books.



History Check:
Martek and the Desert of Desolation

By Sterling Hershey

Illustration by Claudio Pozas

Welcome to this continuing series featuring iconic setting elements from the Dungeons & Dragons® game. Each History Check article recalls the game's classic characters and events, while adding new insights. Sidebars in the text provide guidance to both Dungeon Masters and players as to what a character might know of these stories with a successful skill check.

This installment focuses on the dreaded Desert of Desolation, and a prophecy that the great wizard Martek both created and enabled. Martek once dueled, bested, and temporarily banished a great efreeti. Knowing that his evil foe would return one day in the distant future, Martek set in motion a complex series of events designed to activate his Sphere of Power at the proper moment.

Whereas many History Check articles cover the foundations of a broad topic, this installment discusses a specific campaign adventure. Though spoilers are few, some revelations are unavoidable, and others add richness to the discussion by providing examples of the adventure's many creative encounters. Players who want to avoid too many spoilers might wish to read only the first half of the article, which covers the adventure's ancient history. Starting with the "Desert of Destiny" section, the article explores one way that the adventure might unfold.

THE I-SERIES AND DESERT OF DESOLATION

Adventures in the Desert of Desolation first appeared as modules I3, I4, and I5 for the Advanced Dungeons & Dragons® game. *Pharaoh*, *Oasis of the White Palm*, and *Lost Tomb of Martek*, respectively, could be played separately or together as a longer story. They had no specific campaign world.

The three were later combined and expanded into an epic, single-volume campaign adventure called the *Desert of Desolation*, also for the AD&D® game. That adventure is the focus of this article. The book added numerous player handouts, maps, and a cryptic alphabet for the players to decipher. It also placed the adventure in the Forgotten Realms® setting, though the action was only loosely connected to that campaign world.

TM & © 2013 Wizards of the Coast LLC. All rights reserved.

Efreeti Assault

"Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to our humble caravan. I can see that you're in the mood for a tale of adventure! Today, in exchange for a small donation, I offer the story of the great wizard Martek and the Desert of Desolation. Who wants to hear this epic tale? Ah, thank you, sir! That contribution will start us off well.

"This story is a grand tale that spans a thousand years. No, please, don't get up! You see, the interesting bits happen at the beginning and the end, so my humble storyteller's art can turn a thousand years in the desert into a simple evening's tale.

"That said, the story is anything but simple. Powerful wizards such as Martek complicate all that they touch—probably by necessity, or possibly by habit—I'm never quite sure. If a wizard studies only complex magic, might he devise only complex solutions? Whatever the answer to that question, it seems that powerful wizards try to control every problem they encounter. And so it was that Martek, the so-called "greatest of mages," felt compelled to devise the greatest of prophecies to ensure that future events would unfold in a precise manner of his own choosing.

"In ancient days, Martek was the Grand Vizier in a lively desert land called Raurin that boasted many thriving cities and kingdoms. Some say Raurin was near the Faerûn land of Durpar; others say this tale is much older, and Raurin lay worlds away.

"The great River Athis once connected Raurin to the greatest desert kingdoms. This mighty waterway provided easy travel and served as the lifeblood of the region. Alas, the river had a magical source, and when the Pharaoh Amun-Re called down a curse upon his land, the river dried up. Travel became difficult, and the cities began to fail.

"The lands must have seemed lightly guarded in those times—especially to an evil efreeti bent on destruction. Worse, this was no simple, lesser efreeti—this was Khalitharius, one of the six efreeti pashas and a Vizier of the Fire Sultan. As a pasha, Khalitharius had immense wealth, as well as power over his own domain within the Plane of Fire—or was that the Plane of Elemental Chaos? Old tales often use old names, I'm afraid, but the name doesn't matter. What does matter is that a pasha would leave his domain only on orders from his master, the Fire Sultan. One might logically assume that the Fire Sultan unleashed Khalitharius on Raurin and the surrounding desert lands deliberately, but the tales do not relate the reasons for the attack. Did someone from the desert anger the Fire Sultan? Did Martek pose a threat? Had Khalitharius somehow offended his master, earning exile to the desert as his punishment? To this day, no one has ever discovered the answers to these questions.

"Khalitharius swept across the desert in a whirlwind of fire, death, and destruction. He claimed the abandoned city of Medinat Muskawoon and gathered an army of minions and undead called the Malatath. Can you imagine a great, fiery efreeti at the head of an undead army? No one, it appeared, could oppose him—neither king nor army. And so his force laid waste to the desert civilizations."

THE ZAROVANS

Marov Zarovan, narrator of this History Check, is one of the more arrogant members of the traveling Zarovan tribe of the Vistani.

More information about the Vistani can be found in *Player's Option: Heroes of Shadow*™, the boxed set *The Shadowfell: Gloomwrought and Beyond*™, and the Vistani articles in *Dragon* 380.

Martek's Magic

"But Khalitharius had made one grave mistake. Rare indeed is the land that has a great wizard as its guardian, but this desert did. And since the efreeti had established his base in Medinat Muskawoon, Martek knew just where to find his enemy.

"The great wizard led a caravan across the desert sands to the domain of Khalitharius. The events that transpired during that trek were so deadly that the only reports of them came from a half-crazed survivor—and centuries of retelling muddled them still more.

"I will share these stories, bizarre though they may be. Each morning as the caravan approached the city, its members discovered the dried, husk-like corpse of a night guard. One night, the camels all died. Then, half the water barrels mysteriously drained. Dread settled over the caravan, and nobody slept. Everyone feared the mysterious Malatath, which Martek blamed for the troubles.

"Finally, the caravan arrived at the outskirts of Medinat Muskawoon, and Martek prepared to face Khalitharius. His followers built a tall dais from which Martek could cast his powerful incantations. He needed time, so the survivors arrayed themselves around the mage, vowing to protect him when the undead threatened to overwhelm his position.

"At the darkest hour of night, Martek began. Magical fire surrounded him and grew as bright as daylight. Khalitharius arrived almost immediately, adorned with fantastic golden ornaments and a glowing headdress, his fiery red form bright against the darkness. He flew over the desert, circling Martek, as the wizard's own magical fire grew ever taller.

"Finally, the Malatath attacked. The undead were an awful sight, armed with vicious weapons and sporting unhealed, frightfully sickening open wounds. Trapped between the Malatath and Martek's

fire, the remaining guards fell, one by one, until the meager circle was broken.

"But the Malatath were too late. As they advanced on the fiery dais, Martek called upon the desert gods—*by name*—demanding that they extinguish the efreeti's flames. Martek's magical, multicolored fire exploded across the battlefield, engulfing everyone in a powerful, supernatural blast so hot that it ignited the desert itself. The fire burned for twenty years, turning the desert sands to glass.

"Martek imprisoned Khalitharius in a special box he had created. Knowing that his victory was only temporary, the wizard used the power of prophecy and his own ingenuity to devise a complex plan that would ensure the ultimate defeat of Khalitharius a thousand years in the future. First, Martek created five powerful, magic jewels that he named the Star Gems. Each had a specific purpose, but all would be required to release Martek's Sphere of Power. If activated at the right moment, the Sphere of Power would defeat the efreeti once and for all. Then Martek hid the Star Gems in safe places across the desert. Finally, to ensure that their locations and the knowledge of how to counter the efreeti would survive the centuries, Martek wrote a prophecy tying them all together.

Martek's plan was clever and complex. Its success depended upon a brave band of adventurers arriving to carry it out a thousand years after the wizard who had devised it was gone."

HISTORY CHECK

The following History check DCs indicate how much the characters know about the ancient history of Martek, Khalitharius, and the prophecy.

History DC 15—The great wizard Martek once lived in what is now the Desert of Desolation. He guarded the land from great evil.

History DC 20—The River Athis was once the central trade and water source in the desert. It stopped flowing when a pharaoh cursed his own rebellious people. It hasn't flowed for more than a thousand years.

History DC 25—Centuries ago, an evil efreeti attacked the desert communities with an army of undead. Martek destroyed him using magical fire and the power of the gods.

History DC 30—Khalitharius was the name of the efreeti, who had his own domain on the Plane of Fire (or in the Elemental Chaos).

History DC 35—Martek created an object called the Sphere of Power to defeat Khalitharius, should he ever rise again. No one knows exactly what this item is.

Desert of Destiny

"Now, friends, over that millennium, the desert changed. The people learned to do without the River Athis. The Sandvoyager's Guild eventually restarted the trade caravans and found routes through the harsh desert. Kingdoms and their peoples lived, died, and evolved. But amid all this change, certain traditions passed down through the ages unaltered, as Martek had hoped. Most importantly, his prophecy lived on.

"As predicted, the imminent return of Khalitharius and Martek's prophecy were discovered just in time by an astrologer named Aman Al-Raqib. How? He read it in an old tome that the wizard Martek had written. Convenient? Absolutely. Martek had probably designed it to be found at just the right moment.

"Martek's strategem worked. Realizing that time was short, Aman implored his far-off friend Elminster the Sage to send a band of heroes suited for such an epic task. By fate or fortune, the letter never reached Elminster. The messenger ran afoul of trolls, and his letter ended up in a pile of junk in their caves.

"Fate intervened when the trolls trapped a party of adventurers inside the same cave. Desperate to escape, they found the letter along with a teleportation ritual that instantly transported them to Aman's residence in the far off city of Bralizzar.

"Convinced that Elminster had sent these heroes, Aman was overjoyed at their arrival. With fate and prophecy involved, Aman wasn't about to let the heroes avoid their destiny. By persuasion, manipulation, or a combination of both, he sent them over the Northknife Pass and into the Desert of Desolation.

"As often happens, our heroes knew few specifics. They knew that they had to retrieve the Star Gems and somehow use Martek's Sphere of Power—whatever that was—before Khalitharius escaped and sought revenge on the desert communities. They had a few maps and a few clues, but the rest was up to them."

The Efreeti Escapes

"You will not be hearing about every trail, trick, trap, tomb, tome, villain, and ally the heroes encountered along the way. The pursuit of the Star Gems took many weeks, if not months, to complete, and we don't have that luxury here tonight. But I will gladly tell you all the high points—at least as long as your generous donations tell me that you want to hear them. When the coins stop, so do I.

"*What?* Only a few copper? Perhaps the tale does not interest you? Very well then, I shall relate a bit more, and then we shall see if you wish me to continue.

"Like many epic adventures, this one began in disaster. First, the heroes made their way to the city of Pazar. With the aid of their old map fragment and an ancient signpost, they discovered a single statue standing alone in the desert sands—but no city.

"Suddenly, the sands gave way beneath their feet! The desert sucked them down into a buried building. Indeed, the entire city had sunk beneath the desert in the years after the River Athis ran dry.

"A thorough search of the buildings revealed a chamber that featured a white marble altar with a pulsing black gem set on top. A diligent search tipped the heroes off to the trap on the altar. Congratulating themselves for resolving a problem using cunning rather than brute strength, the heroes removed the Star of Aga-Pelar from its seat.

"Too easy, you say? Perhaps, but only more coin will provide the answer.

"Another copper? Your generosity knows no bounds. Yes, obtaining the gem had been too easy, as the heroes realized when a booming laugh shook the room. Indeed, on their very first outing, the heroes had released Khalitharius, the efreeti.

"Prophecy? I say so. But whether his release had been preordained or not, the efreeti was loose on the desert, and the heroes were responsible. So as Martek had planned, the heroes now had a strong incentive to see the long, dangerous task through to its completion."

Breaking the Curse

"Ah, you do have silver coins! Everyone loves a good villain, it seems, and Khalitharius certainly adds value to the tale.

"Horrified by their mistake, the heroes entered the ancient lands of Bakar. Their sense of destiny grew stronger when an apparition of the great Pharaoh Amen-Re appeared. It was this ruler who had used Osiris's name to curse the land and halt the River Athis. The god had not been amused, so he in turn cursed the pharaoh to walk the desert for all time. Only the theft of the Star of Mo-Pelar from his pyramid would allow him to enter it and begin the afterlife. Thus, Amen-Re demanded the heroes' aid in freeing his soul from the god's curse.

"The Pyramid of Amun-Re was glorious and complex, and it had remained theft-proof for more than a thousand years. I could tell a week's worth of stories based on that site alone.

"Ah, more silver? You would know how the pyramid resisted intruders? Very well.

"How would you fare, finding your way through a maze filled with a disorienting, orange fog? How about a room that would crush you as flat as papyrus? Could you answer a sphinx's riddle? In addition to all these challenges were the minotaurs that guarded the Pharaoh's resting place.

"These challenges represented only the ground level's defenses. Only the clever could discover the halls of the priesthood, with their marvelous Dome of Flight. Inside this tall chamber with its semicircular dome, any object (or person) not held down would float upward to the top of the room. Growing from the floor of the room were palm trees with unusual fruit that, when it floated upward, exploded with a loud bang. The heroes knew an advantage when they saw one. They harvested the remaining fruit and used it to blow up many of the pyramid's guardians!

"And fortunate it was that they did so, because the very next level held a prepared gauntlet of enemies and even more traps. Legends say that an ancient priest who served Amun-Re dwelled there also.

"After overcoming these dangers, the heroes finally ascended to—well now, it looks like the money has stopped flowing, much like the River Athis.

"What? Back to copper? A pity. This tale is worth at least a few gold. Oh well. Suffice it to say that the heroes found the Star of Mo-Pelar, broke the curse, and restarted the water in the River of Athis."

The Oasis of the White Palm

"It would take years for the flowing waters to restore the river to its former level. So, our heroes followed the still-dry river valley through the harsh desert to the distant Oasis of the White Palm—the largest and most popular oasis in the desert. People from every desert tribe frequented this bright outpost of civilization.

"Despite the cosmopolitan nature of the oasis, numerous factions vied for power here. Though hardly friends, the groups maintained a sort of balance for many years. That situation changed radically with the escape of Khalitharius.

"The prophecy, penned by the manipulator Martek, specified that the woman destined to be the sheik's bride would carry a magical print in the palm of her hand, as would the woman fated to wed the sheik's firstborn son. Martek had also contrived to ensure that each of the two men would carry a special amulet. Somehow, the prints and the amulets together revealed . . . well, let's just say it was not another Star Gem. See? This is the kind of tale that copper buys you.

"Following the prophecy, the heroes arrived at the oasis to find that the betrothed of the sheik's firstborn—an actual princess—had disappeared. Every faction had good reason to suspect the others of foul play, and this added tension threatened to upset the fragile power balance of the place. The heroes used charm, deceit, and daring to navigate the political dangers. In the process of hunting for the lost princess, they discovered an ancient Temple of Set, in which the worshipers had also paid homage to the efreeti.

"Martek too knew of the temple, and he concealed the Star of Khan-Pelar inside. When the heroes found the gem, they also learned that the lost city of Phoenix held an imprisoned djinni with enough power to counter Khalitharius. The scrolls found with the gem also revealed how to release the djinni—and that process required the princess. Eventually, the heroes realized that none of the oasis factions held the kidnapped princess—Khalitharius had taken her and secreted her in the nearby Crypt of Badr Al-Mosak."

The Crypt of Badr Al-Mosak

"Come now, my friends! The efreeti's story is surely worth a few more coins. Very well, you'll see.

"Desperate to free the djinni, the heroes convinced the sheik to let them borrow one of the amulets and search the crypt. Another hurried trek across the desert brought them to a great amphitheater that concealed the entrance to the tomb. The heroes soon discovered that this place was the efreeti's new stronghold, where his undead Malatath had gathered. Still, most of the danger came from traps and creatures placed there to defend the crypt from looters and thieves.

"Ah, good throw sir! For your silver, I present the Pits of Everfall. Legends held that weapons, items, people, or unexpected tidbits such as, say, mummies cast into these deep shafts would never hit bottom. Instead, just before striking the floor, they instantly teleported to the top of the shaft to begin the fall again.

"The pits provided a handy outlet for our heroes' stress. Sick of the troublesome antics of their thieving halfling ally, they chucked him into a Pit of Everfall while he slept. He awoke temporarily terrified, but the last laugh was on his comrades, because he realized that the pits also provided a way to access another level. Begrudgingly, his friends fished him back out and figured out how to move on. Both efforts proved challenging because of the ever-falling debris and mummies.

"Other traps were much less amusing; in fact, they were devastatingly deadly. One room was beautiful to behold, with a thousand beams of light reflecting off crystalline walls and ceilings. But the light held awful powers, disintegrating one poor soul as he crossed the room. Poof! Gone in an instant.

"When the heroes eventually found Khalitharius and the princess, the efreeti was holding his captive inside a bottle. Martek's planning and the prophecy he had written finally brought the heroes, the princess, and the amulet together. The battle was a furious one, but the powerful amulet gave the heroes the edge they needed to drive Khalitharius away and rescue the princess.

"With her help, they worked out the location of the Lost City of Phoenix, found the Star of Shah-Pelar, and defeated the wards and traps protecting it. The heroes returned the princess to the Oasis of the White Palm, then headed out across the desert."

The Lost City of Phoenix

"Phoenix was once a playground for the pharaohs and their rich subjects. But these wealthy patrons abandoned the city to the desert sands after the River Athis dried up, and Phoenix slowly fell to ruin under the magical dome built to protect it from the encroaching sand.

"Long before the heroes came looking, the desert sands had completely covered the city's dome. As the heroes passed overhead, their weight, when combined with that of their steeds, caused the dome to give way. Short-lived sinkholes dropped them through the dome to the city street below.

"Although the dome had protected the city for the most part, enough sand had infiltrated over the years to cover many buildings. The people were long gone, but many of the amusements built for royal and wealthy tourists still worked. The heroes found these diversions amusing, but often dangerous and even deadly.

"Eventually, they found the djinni's prison and freed him, as Martek had planned. The djinni blew through the city's dome and sped away to engage the hated efreeti. The heroes climbed out of the buried city and resumed their hunt for the remaining Star Gems."

HISTORY CHECK

If the events described here have already passed in your campaign, the following History check DCs indicate how much the characters know of the recent history of Martek and Khalitharius, as well as the efforts of the heroes.

History DC 15—Khalitharius returned after a thousand years to rampage once again across the Desert of Desolation, but a powerful djinni countered and defeated him only a few weeks later. The character knows some details about the Desert of Desolation region.

History DC 20—Martek prophesied the return of Khalitharius and arranged for the release of the djinni to fight him. The character knows some details of the prophecy.

History DC 25—The River Athis has begun to flow again, after a group of heroes entered the Pyramid of Amun-Re and broke the curse. The character knows some details of the pyramid of Amun-Re.

History DC 30—A group of adventurers scavenged the desert for the fabled Star Gems, hoping to fulfill Martek's prophecy. The character knows some details about one or more of the heroes' specific exploits.

History DC 35—The adventurers succeeded in releasing Martek's Sphere of Power. The character might even know the adventurers' names.

Skysea and Medinat Muskawoon

"I haven't heard the jingle of coins in a while. Perhaps you're tired out and would like to stop? Ah, I thought not. Thank you, madam.

"Now, though our heroes were also weary, they followed Martek's map, which they had found earlier in the Temple of Set, and headed for the ruins of Medinat Muskawoon. As they approached, a mirrorlike sea of glass blocked their path.

"It was the Skysea, created by Martek's magical fire in his ancient battle with Khalitharius. The heat and light that reflected from its surface made passage on foot painfully dangerous, and flying above it was little better. Fortunately for the heroes, fate intervened, and they found a wondrous cloudskate. It resembled a boat mounted on massive, swordlike blades, and it carried devices created to use the blistering heat as propulsion. The boat floated on magic, with its blades barely touching the glass.

"While sailing the Skysea, the heroes found the Cursed Isle, on which lay the equally cursed city of Medinat Muskawoon. Its only inhabitants were the ghosts and apparitions of its old populace, who were forced to relive the city's final days each night. In Medinat Muskawoon, the heroes found another of Martek's riddles. From it, they deduced the Star Gem's location and the nature of the wards protecting it. They began to search the town for the items they would need for safe passage, and they quickly found what they required—cleverly disguised by Market, as usual.

"At last they gained access to the temple that housed the Star of Melos-Pelar. As soon as they plucked the gem from its resting place, it began to guide them to Martek's Sphere of Power."

The Citadel of Martek

"Bear with me now, ladies and gentlemen—we're nearing the end of the tale. I promise you, only a few more generous donations such as this one will see you through.

"After the adventurers had all the Star Gems, the Star of Melos-Pelar guided them to the Pillar of Martek, an obelisk on which the wizard had left more instructions.

"In accordance with these directions, the heroes struck the pillar, which rang like a tuning fork. As the note died away, the sky overhead rippled, and an enormous, crystal building appeared, floating above them. A green light pulled the heroes up, and up, and into the Garden of the Cursed.

"Yes, curses abound in the desert, and even Martek doled out a few. No one needed the Star Gems to call the citadel and enter it, but without the gems, no one could move beyond the garden or leave. Thus, a great many people met the heroes inside. Some had lived their entire lives here, while others had only recently arrived. Some proved to be allies, and others were competitors who hindered the heroes' efforts.

"The heroes quickly learned what they could about the place from their new acquaintances, then they entered the Grand Hall—or rather, a grand hallway. After passing through a thousand and one doors and dealing with yet another guardian, they won their way to the Crystal Prism Cathedral.

"You would think that by now, after weeks of treasure hunting, battling an efreeti and his undead minions, winning all the Star Gems, and penetrating the citadel, the heroes would have proven their good intentions. But wizards are a stubborn and protective lot, who plan for every contingency. The Crystal Prism Cathedral held yet more tests for the heroes. Before they could finish their mission, they had to retrieve several miniature minarets from mystical realms and replace them on a model that already held three others.

"I'm sure you would pay a few gold to hear about the otherworldly realms, yes? Anyone? No? They really are fantastic. It's a pity I misjudged your pocketbooks. Maybe next time."

The Inner Sanctum

"As tempted as I am to leave the story here, I'll chip in a shiny coin of my own to finish off the story tonight. Unfortunately, I'm as cheap as you are.

"As you'd expect, the intrepid heroes succeeded once again. Placing the last minaret transported the adventurers into Martek's inner sanctum, where his Sphere of Power lay. The heroes were quite surprised by what it turned out to be, but fortunately it was simple to use and worked wonderfully. As soon as they activated the sphere, Khalitharius burst into a million streaks of flame and was utterly destroyed. Our heroes even gained a handsome reward—unlike me, this evening. My apologies—next time I'll select a tale more attuned to your coin purses. Thank you and good night."

About the Author

Sterling Hershey is an architect and freelance game designer. He is a contributor to *D&D Insider* and a designer on *Monster Vault: Threats to the Nentir Vale*™. He also designed many *Star Wars Roleplaying Game* and *Star Wars Miniatures* game products.

Unearthed Arcana
Achievements

By Robert J. Schwalb

Illustrations by Tyler Jacobson, Ryan Pancoast, Wayne England, Chris Seaman, and Ania Mohrbacher

After the expedition to the Thunderspire Labyrinth, everyone agreed they needed a break. On returning to Fallcrest, the Company of Swords broke apart. They each split off to spend their treasure, pursue their private interests, and find some quiet time. They all believed a few peaceful weeks would do them good.

On the appointed night when they were to regroup, Corgan shifted in his seat. He peered into his empty tankard with a skeptical eye, searching for another drop. It wouldn't do to get drunk, not before heading off to that queer pyramid.

Most of his companions sat with him, sharing their stories of romance and investment, business and secrets uncovered. Corgan ignored them all. His eye was on the door. One member was missing, and they couldn't leave this town until all were accounted for. Syl was late as usual, probably because he was still talking his way out of jail.

Just as Corgan was about to head off to the watch headquarters to bail out the thief, the slight halfling slipped through the doors. His eyes shifted back and forth. He glided between the tables, watching the other patrons. When he looked up and spied Corgan, he grinned and mopped his brow with a red cloth.

"Corgan, my friend! Sorry I'm late. You'll never guess what happened to me. Remember that cult we've been tracking? Well . . ."

Throughout an adventurer's career, gold, magic items, jewels, and other treasures find their way into his or her pockets. Such wonders provide impetus for venturing into the world's most dangerous places. Although nobler reasons might propel the heroes into dungeons and ruins, plunder compensates the hero for risks taken and injuries sustained. But are there rewards beyond the coins and enchanted trinkets?

Of course there are. Intangible rewards, described in the *Rules Compendium*™, include such things as medals, titles, and favors. These minor gains result from completing quests; they have little to no monetary value. Instead, they add color to your character, advance the story, or perhaps add a circumstantial benefit to situations in which their possession proves advantageous. For example, a medal might give the character access to the duke's court, while calling in a favor might allow the character to reach a portal to a far-flung destination.

In addition to these minor rewards, there are achievements. Similarly, these don't usually have a monetary value—or at least a value that fits into the game's economy. An achievement is often quite a bit larger and more important to the story, and its acquisition can shape the campaign in different ways. Although achievements might be similar to other intangible rewards such as castles, ships, lands, titles, and so on, they differ in how one achieves them. Rather than gaining the information or boon through game play, players gain achievements between adventures, when their characters pursue their interests. In effect, achievements are rewards gained during downtime—even between gaming sessions.

TM & © 2013 Wizards of the Coast LLC. All rights reserved.

Using Achievements

Achievements enrich campaigns. Their acquisition adds definition to adventurers, grounding them in the world and helping them shape their environment in meaningful ways. Furthermore, achievements let players take an active role in advancing the plot by following up on leads and developing those hooks that draw them into the next adventure.

Achievement Categories

Each achievement falls into one of the following categories.

Association: Association achievements are ones where you make a connection to a nonplayer character (NPC) or organization. You might join a thieves' guild, enlist in an army, woo a potential lover, or befriend a powerful person. These achievements lay foundations for other achievements. For instance, after seducing a noble, you might later try to convince her to help you (influence), share gossip (information), or fund a nautical expedition (material).

Influence: Attaining an influence achievement lets you alter the story in some way. These achievements change your circumstances or the circumstances of another. Examples include getting invited to the duke's ball, convincing a constable to release a prisoner, gaining access to a guarded library, or convincing a ship captain to delay departure. Influence achievements often set up future adventures.

Information: Tracking down a villain to his or her hideout, deciphering a coded message, or mapping a region are all information achievements. In effect, you learn an important clue or fact. This information might reveal why something happened, what something means, or where you might go next.

Material: Material achievements give you ownership of something. Normally, these achievements do not modify your character's abilities; they are simply objects such as castles and ships. They have story consequences rather than mechanical ones. Further, such items do not always require an investment of treasure. In some cases, the achievement does, in fact, give you an object you can use in your adventures, like a magic item. In this case, however, you must pay its price to gain the achievement.

Gaining Achievements

Achievements are like any other reward and can be gained through normal adventuring. You might clear a castle of its inhabitants and claim it as part of your spoils. Or saving the crown princess might reward you with influence in the king's court, titles to lands, or guarded information about the king's ancestry. Achievements differ from other rewards, however, in that you can gain them between adventures, during the downtime after a successful expedition. Narrative challenges provide a way to gain achievements when you're not otherwise engaged in the campaign's story.

Narrative Challenges

Narrative challenges resemble skill challenges in many ways. During a narrative challenge, you name an objective. You then make a series of skill checks and, based on your successes and failures, achieve or don't achieve your objective. There are differences, however.

A narrative challenge almost never takes place during an actual adventure. Instead, you play through the challenge during downtime, when your character might otherwise be resting, investing treasure, or waiting for the next adventure to begin. The narrative challenge describes how your character spends his or her time and what gains that character earns for his or her efforts.

Because narrative challenges most often occur between game sessions and can be played with or without a Dungeon Master, they have more structure than a skill challenge. Each narrative challenge has a tight script featuring several skill checks with built-in results. Your successes and failures propel your character through the challenge to the conclusion, wherein you learn whether you gained the achievement.

Finally, a narrative challenge is usually a solitary enterprise. It's possible for two or more characters to participate in the same narrative challenge, with allies aiding a lead character. If the entire party becomes involved, however, the Dungeon Master might instead construct an adventure or skill challenge to replace the narrative challenge.

The Basics

Every narrative challenge unfolds in a similar manner. First, you choose a desired achievement: make an association, influence the story, gain information, or acquire material goods. Next, you move through the stages of the challenge. At each stage, you make a skill check. The check result determines the next stage and the next skill check. After several stages, you reach the end of the challenge and learn the consequences.

Components of a Narrative Challenge

Narrative challenges have five main components.

1. Achievement: The achievement of a challenge is your objective, which you hope to gain by reaching the challenge's conclusion.

2. Time: A narrative challenge takes more time than does a typical skill challenge. A narrative challenge can take days, weeks, or even months to complete.

3. Level and DCs: Many narrative challenges are open to characters of any level and will have a level equal to that of the character undertaking it. A few might require a minimum level; they will include this requirement in the challenge's description.

When the challenge calls for a skill check, it describes the DC as being easy, moderate, or hard. Find the Difficulty Class by Level table in the *Rules Compendium*. Your level determines the DC for these checks. For example, if your character is 5th level and

the challenge calls for a hard Athletics check, you would make the check against a DC 22.

4. Skill Stages: Each challenge includes several stages. Within a stage is a description of what it entails, the skill needed to move through the stage, and the consequences for success or failure, usually resulting in you moving to a different stage. Depending on your check result, you might gain a bonus or penalty to your next skill check. Bonuses and penalties are cumulative.

Some stages include a shortcut. A shortcut provides an alternative path through the stage, usually because of a power, ritual, or item. Shortcuts might also include skill checks.

5. Conclusion: The conclusion describes how the challenge ends. The outcome depends on whether you reached this stage with a success or a failure. Usually, a success means you gain the desired achievement while failure means you don't. In addition, a failure might have other negative and story-related consequences. These might create complications, encourage a hasty escape from town, or spark another adventure.

A narrative challenge grants no XP reward. The achievement itself is the reward.

Using Narrative Challenges

Narrative challenges are a powerful tool to explore what happens when the characters aren't involved in an adventure. They are not always appropriate or needed, however; before running a narrative challenge, keep the following in mind.

Work with the DM: Explain to the DM what achievement you hope to gain, why it's important to your character, and how it can advance the story. You might want to track a villain to his or her lair, only to learn the DM plans to make this a feature of the next adventure. Also, the DM might have story reasons for putting off your request. Building your castle might be fine, but if your party is heading off to a different continent, you won't be able to enjoy the castle.

Downtime: The most common way to use narrative challenges is during downtime between adventures, but they can also be used between game sessions. Perhaps the characters are on an adventure in a city, and they have separate tasks that will further the story (learning where the thieves' guild has its hideout, bribing an official for the authority to fight the thieves, researching a strange magical tattoo all the thieves have, and so on). You can play out the result of the characters' efforts between sessions and thus come to the table ready to keep the adventure going.

Side Trek: A character might split from the party to pursue a different lead or to do something related to the adventure. A narrative challenge can provide a quick resolution to this subplot so you can get back to the game's central focus.

Fit the Story: A narrative challenge should fit into the larger story. Before a character can work toward a particular achievement, think about where the character is, how much time he or she has, and whether the desired achievement is even possible. For example, a character spending a week in the Nine Hells' Iron City of Dis probably won't be able to build a castle both because of location and time. Likewise, it's probably not possible to woo Esmeralda in Fallcrest when the characters are spending three days in Winterhaven.

Managing the Challenge: You can play through a narrative challenge by yourself, but your DM might want to be present to help structure the results. You might handle this during a break in the game, before or after the session, or even by exchanging emails. Most challenges don't take more than a few minutes to resolve, so you can get the results quickly.

Example of Play

This example shows a player and a DM working together before a game session to run through a narrative challenge. The adventurer is Rook (a drow thief). After defeating the Stormcrows in Forlorn Tower, the adventuring party returned to Wellspring for some much-needed downtime. Rook, however, decides to use the downtime to spy on an NPC named Dierdra. A priestess of Ioun, she has been a sometime-ally, but she could not explain her presence in Wellspring when she was supposed to be leading refugees south to Sumberton. Rook's player explains to the DM what he'd like to do. The DM agrees there's time and offers to run through the narrative challenge.

Rook is 12th level, so his DCs are 14 for easy, 20 for moderate, and 28 for hard. The DM picks the "Track Down a Villain" challenge and modifies the stages to fit the story. The achievement is to learn if Dierdra is engaged in any suspicious activity. If Rook succeeds, he gains an information achievement: knowledge that Dierdra is up to no good. If Rook fails, he doesn't find out any useful information.

DM: So you think Dierdra is up to something, huh?

Rook: I'm sure of it, and I aim to prove it.

DM: What do you want to do?

Rook: Seems to me the best place to start is to figure out where she is now. If I can corner her, I plan to ask some very pointed questions.

DM: Right. To learn this information, you'll need to make a Streetwise check. And, just so you know, this will take an hour.

Rook: Understood. I got a 21.

DM: Great! Well, you prowl Wellspring's back alleys, and you drift into a few taverns to talk to folk from the streets. A toothless fellow, smelling of sour milk, tells you he saw her at the Red Feather Inn. He was collecting his crust of bread from the kind matron

there when he saw a woman matching Dierdra's description slip inside. That was an hour ago.

Rook: Huh. Does he know anything else? Namely, where this inn might be?

DM: That's all he knows, though he can point you to the inn. He mentions that he doesn't want any trouble for the matron. He'd hate to go hungry.

Rook: I leave him and head off to the Red Feather.

DM: All right. You find the inn where the toothless man said it would be, tucked into an alley off a side street. What do you want to do now?

Rook: I'll stake out the place. Is there anywhere I can hide?

DM: Sure, though it'll obstruct your view a bit.

Rook: The last thing I want to do at this point is show my hand. Yeah, I'll hide. I got a 28 on my Stealth check.

DM: Wow! You're invisible or darn close to it. You find a good place to hide and watch the inn. How long do you want to wait?

Rook: I'm a drow. I can go all night long.

DM: Right. Okay, then, make a Perception check.

Rook: Ugh, a 1. I got a 9 total.

DM: You were looking down at the time, but you think someone just left the inn. You can try again, but you'll need to come out from hiding.

Rook: Yeah. Fine. That's better. A 20.

DM: It was Dierdra. She didn't notice you. What now?

Rook: I'm going to shadow her.

DM: Right. Give me a Stealth check.

Rook: Good grief! Another 1. That's an 18.

DM: Uh-oh. You follow her steps, keeping pace and trying to stay out of her view. Something draws her attention—maybe a sound you made. She looks your way and meets your eyes. She snarls once and then starts running. In an instant, she's out of view.

Rook: I'll give chase.

DM: Okay, make an Athletics check.

Rook: Ugh, my dice hate me! I got a 14.

DM: No problem. It was enough. You keep up with her, following her through the city. A couple times she almost got away. Finally, you come to the town square. You know, the one with the big weird statue?

Rook: Right. The one pointing toward the mountains.

DM: That's the one. Well, she stops in front of it and does something to a rock. She gives you one last hate-filled glare and then slips inside the statue.

Rook: Darn it! Hmm. I want to check out that statue.

DM: Sure thing. How about a Perception check?

Rook: Already on it. This time a 21.

DM: Good job. Yep. You find a secret door. There's a latch hidden in the carving.

Rook: I want to keep going, but I don't think that would be a good idea without the rest of the party. I'm heading back to the inn to tell them what I found out.

Rook gained the information achievement at the end when he discovered Dierdra was up to something and also that there was a secret door in the statue. Had Rook pressed on, he would have moved out of the narrative challenge and into an encounter area. The DM would run this as a normal adventure, though a dangerous one since Rook would be going alone.

Because the DM was involved, she could adjust the narrative challenge to suit the situation. Had Rook run through this challenge alone, he would have just followed the options presented in the script.

Sample Narrative Challenges

The following narrative challenges provide ready-to-use examples to gain specific achievements. You can use them as written or adjust them to fit your circumstances.

Blaze a Trail

You scout the wilderness to learn the lay of the land.

Since the last empire's fall, the wilderness has reclaimed lands once civilized. New growth covers the old trade routes, and the few surviving paths are perilous, haunted by cruel humanoids and vicious monsters. Even the waterways are unsafe. To reach a distant destination, one must endure not only travel's rigors but also the many perils lying in wait.

Achievement (Information): You explore a region to find a safe path to a destination about a week's travel away. If you succeed, you find or create a path to speed your travel.

Time: 1 week

Stage 1: The Expedition Begins

You leave civilization's bounds and venture into the unknown.

Exploring the wilderness is hard work. To survey the land quickly, you must push yourself and keep walking and keep searching even when fatigue sets in. Make an Endurance check against a moderate DC.

Success by 5 or more: You are more than equal to the task. You gain a +2 bonus to Athletics checks for the duration of the challenge. Go to stage 2.

Success: You hold up well. Go to stage 2.

Failure: You are fatigued. You take a –2 penalty to the skill check in the next stage. Go to stage 2.

Failure by 5 or more: You are exhausted, and you must rest. You take a –2 penalty to all skill checks for the duration of the challenge. You must repeat this stage. If you get this result a second time, go to the conclusion.

Stage 2: Difficult Terrain

You come to a tough obstacle, such as a white-water river, a cliff, or a chasm.

To overcome the obstacle, you must climb, jump, or swim. Make an Athletics check against a moderate DC.

Success by 5 or more: You easily overcome the obstacle. You can roll twice for your next skill check and take the higher result. Go to stage 3.

Success: You overcome the obstacle and continue your journey. Go to stage 3.

Failure: You are banged up. Maybe you slipped and fell or the river carried you downstream. You take a –2 penalty to the skill check during the next stage. Go to stage 3.

Failure by 5 or more: You fail to get through the obstacle and are injured in the process. You must repeat this stage with a –2 penalty to all skill checks for the duration of the challenge. If you gain this result a second time, go to the conclusion.

Stage 3: Find a Good Vantage

Having explored the region, you move off to get a good view.

You must find a location to gain a good overview of the terrain. Make a Nature check against an easy DC.

Success by 5 or more: You know just where to look. You gain a +2 bonus to Perception checks during the next stage. Go to stage 4.

Success: You find a serviceable lookout. Go to stage 4.

Failure: You find a lookout, though the view is poor. You take a –2 penalty to Perception checks during the next stage.

Failure by 5 or more: You can't find a suitable lookout. Go to the conclusion.

Stage 4: Study the Land

From your vantage, you inspect your surroundings to find a good path.

You study the landscape. Make a Perception check against a moderate DC.

Success: You find a perfect path. Go to the conclusion.

Failure: You don't find a viable path. Go to the conclusion.

Conclusion

After exploring the wilderness, you return to civilization.

If you reached the conclusion from a success, you create a workable map of the area. When traveling through this region, you and all allies with you treat any difficult terrain as one step better for determining your speed according to the Base Exploration Speed and Terrain and Travel tables in the *Rules Compendium*. Additionally, you gain a +2 bonus to all skill checks related to skill challenges needed to travel through this region.

If you reached the conclusion from a failure, you found little success and thus gain no benefits when you travel through this region.

Build a Stronghold

A lasting edifice to honor your achievements, a stronghold will stand long after you have gone.

From castles to fortified temples and from monasteries to primal lodges, a stronghold gives you a place to call home and serves as a retreat from the world's demands where you can rest, recover, and plan your next expedition. Building a stronghold is no easy endeavor. It requires funding, architects, labor, and materials.

Achievement (Material): You work to construct a stronghold. You decide the stronghold's form, purpose, appearance, and location. A stronghold does not normally exceed areas larger than 20 by 30 squares. You can break up the area as you like into rooms, floors, cellars, and so forth. To expand your stronghold, you need to run through this narrative challenge again.

Time: Six months to a year, depending on scope and materials.

Stage 1: Gain Funding

Building a stronghold is expensive. You must have capital to get this enterprise underway.

You might draw funds from your coffers or find backers from among NPCs you meet.

Invest: If you invest 5,000 gp, you can skip this stage and move to stage 2. If you reach the conclusion with a success, you spend this money to fund the construction. If you reach the conclusion with a failure, you lose 2,000 gp due to costs incurred before the construction fell apart.

Seek Investors: Make a Bluff or Diplomacy check against a hard DC.

Success by 5 or more: A friendly NPC who owed you a favor gladly provides the financial backing and also recommends workers to help complete the project. You gain a +2 bonus to the Streetwise check during the next stage. Go to stage 2.

Success: You scrape together funds from numerous sources, though you likely incurred a few debts. Go to stage 2.

Failure: You receive some funding for the project, but you must front the rest. If you spend 1,000 gp, go to stage 2. Otherwise, go to the conclusion.

Failure by 5 or more: You can't find any funding at all. If you spend 2,500 gp, go to stage 2. Otherwise, go to the conclusion.

Stage 2: Recruit Workers

With funds in place, you scour the community for workers.

You need an architect, masons, carpenters, and laborers to complete this project. Make a Streetwise check against a moderate DC.

Success by 5 or more: You find skilled workers to help you complete this project. Reduce the time it takes by 1d4 months. Additionally, you gain a +2 bonus to skill checks for the duration of this challenge. Go to stage 3.

Success: You find the necessary workers to build the stronghold. Go to stage 3.

Failure: You find poor workers. You can retry this check with a –5 penalty or take a –2 penalty to all skill checks for the duration of the challenge, in which case go to stage 3. In any event, add 1d4 months to the time of the challenge. If you get this result or worse a second time, go to the conclusion.

Failure by 5 or more: You find only the worst workers. You can retry this check with a –5 penalty or you take a –4 penalty to all skill checks for the duration of the challenge, in which case go to stage 3. In either case, add 1d8 months to the time. If you get this result a second time, go to the conclusion.

Stage 3: Choose the Site

You study the land or histories for a suitable site.

You need to choose a place to build your stronghold. Make a Dungeoneering, History, or Nature check against a moderate DC.

Success by 5 or more: You find an excellent site with plenty of raw materials to speed up the construction. Reduce the time by 1d4 months. Additionally, during the next stage, you can roll twice for your skill check and use the higher result. Go to stage 4.

Success: You find a suitable site. Go to stage 4.

Failure: You find a poor site. Add 1d4 months to the time. Go to stage 4.

Failure by 5 or more: Your chosen site proves disastrous. Add 1d8 months to the time. During the next stage, you must roll twice for your skill check and use the lower result.

Stage 4: Manage the Workers

Work is underway. You must watch your workers closely to keep their morale high.

You keep a close eye on your workers to make sure they do a good job and to avoid working them too hard. Make an Insight check against an easy DC or an Intimidate check against a moderate DC. If you are trained in Diplomacy, you gain a +2 bonus to this check.

Success: The workers are productive. Go to the conclusion.

Failure: The workers are unhappy and eventually quit. Go to the conclusion.

Conclusion

After months of construction, you either have a new stronghold or a partial one.

If you reached the conclusion from a success, you now have a stronghold and the needed staff to maintain it.

If you reached the conclusion from a failure in stage 1, 2, or 3, the stronghold is not raised.

If you reached the conclusion from a failure in stage 4, the stronghold is partly complete but uninhabitable. You can run through the challenge again to complete it.

Craft a Magic Item

You labor in a workshop to create a new magic item.

Magic items are the stuff of legend. These trinkets, baubles, weapons, and armor exceed the capabilities of mundane equipment and make the impossible possible. Common magic items can sometimes be found in shops and bazaars, but the more powerful and desirable items are far harder to find since the methods for creating them have passed from mortal knowledge. Those well versed in magical study and artifice can put their talents to use and create new common magic items to add to their arsenals.

Achievement (Material): Choose a magic item of your level or lower that the DM approves for this process. (The DM can require you to adventure to acquire some needed materials before even starting

the process.) If you succeed on the challenge, you create the chosen item.

Time: 1 day

Stage 1: Research the Formula

You pore through old manuscripts to find the procedure and ingredients required to create the item you desire.

Magic items are difficult to create. They require strange ingredients combined in precise ways spelled out in hard-to-find writings. To find the formula to create the magic item, you must research it. Make a History check against a hard DC.

Success by 5 or more: You discover a complete formula for creating the item, including substitute ingredients in case you can't find the preferred ones. You gain a +2 bonus to all skill checks for the duration of the challenge. Go to stage 2.

Success: You find a workable formula to create the magic item. Go to stage 2.

Failure: You find an incomplete formula to create the magic item. You take a –2 penalty to the next skill check during this challenge. Go to stage 2.

Failure by 5 or more: You find a dubious formula. You take a –2 penalty to all skill checks for the duration of the challenge. Go to stage 2.

Stage 2: Find the Materials

You scour apothecary shops and haggle with alchemists to find the materials you need.

To craft the item, you must have materials. These include the object to be enchanted, alchemical reagents to bind the magic, and other oddities as called for in the formula.

Use Residuum: If you have residuum, you can substitute an amount up to the magic item's market price. If you use half residuum, you gain a +5 bonus to the Streetwise check during this stage. If you use all residuum, you don't have to make a check, and you gain a +5 bonus to the next skill check during this challenge.

Gather Materials: You must pay for materials worth the magic item's market price. Make a Streetwise check against a moderate DC.

Success by 5 or more: You find exceptional materials. You gain a +2 bonus to the skill check during stage 4. Go to stage 3.

Success: You find the materials you need. Go to stage 3.

Failure: You find poor materials. You take a –2 penalty to the skill check during stage 4. Go to stage 3.

Failure by 5 or more: You find materials, but they are neither complete nor the right ones. You take a –2 penalty to all skill checks for the duration of the challenge. Go to stage 3.

Stage 3: Prepare the Ingredients

Preparing the ingredients exposes you to weird energies.

You prepare the ingredients. Make an Endurance check against an easy DC.

Success: You assemble and prepare the ingredients with no trouble. Go to stage 4.

Failure: The magic addles you. Take a –2 penalty to the next check during this challenge. Go to stage 4.

Failure by 5 or more: You lose consciousness. Choose one of the following: go back to stage 2 and make another Streetwise check; spend one-fifth of the magic item's market price to replace the ruined materials; or go to stage 4 but take a –5 penalty to your Arcana check.

Stage 4: Bind the Magic

You intone the mystical words to flood the item with magical power.

The final step is to bind magic to the item. Make an Arcana check against a moderate DC.

Success: You bind the magic. Go to the conclusion.

OTHER NARRATIVE CHALLENGES

The sample narrative challenges are in no way exhaustive or representative of all that's possible using these rules. You could use these rules to do any of the following.

- Assassinate a minor NPC (influence)
- Attract religious followers (association)
- Bargain with a fiend (information)
- Find a map (information)
- Find a ritual (material)
- Get a prisoner released (influence)
- Impersonate a character (information)
- Lift a curse (material)
- Raise an army (association)
- Raise the dead (material)
- Run a business (association)
- Secure passage on a ship (influence)
- Train an animal (material)
- Train an apprentice (association)
- Win a boon (influence)

When creating a narrative challenge, work with the DM to pick skills that relate to the challenge. Each challenge usually has one easy DC, two moderate DCs, and maybe one hard DC, depending on the challenge.

Failure: You bind the magic to the object, but something goes wrong. Go to the conclusion.

Conclusion

You complete the work to produce the magic item.

If you reached the conclusion from a success, you gain the magic item you created.

If you reached the conclusion from a failed check, you gain the magic item you created, but it doesn't work properly. After each extended rest, roll 1d6. On an odd number, the magic item doesn't function. On an even number, the magic item works normally. This penalty ends when you reach three milestones. Optionally, the DM can create a quirk or curse for the item, the severity of which should be based on how badly you failed.

Forge a Document

You make a convincing copy from an original.

Proper documentation can open doors otherwise closed to you. An invitation might mean the difference between a night at the duke's ball and a night in the cold. A medallion could grant you entry to a wizard academy, while orders with the king's seal could put a fast ship in your hands.

Achievement (Association): You work to create a forgery of a document, badge, or other unique item. If you succeed, you create a copy only the best-trained eye can detect.

Time: 3 days

Stage 1: Find an Original

You need an original to make a good copy.

Original in Hand: If you already have the object you hope to copy, skip this stage and proceed to stage 3.

Original Needed: You hunt for the original you hope to copy. Make a Streetwise check against a hard DC.

Success by 5 or more: You find a good and unguarded copy. You gain a +2 bonus to the Stealth check during the next stage. Go to stage 2.

Success: You find a copy. Go to stage 2.

Failure: You find a guarded copy. You take a –2 penalty to the Stealth check during the next stage. Go to stage 2.

Failure by 5 or more: You get a dubious copy. You can skip stage 2 and go to stage 3, but you take a –4 penalty to all skill checks for the duration of the challenge. Or you can retry this check at a –4 penalty. If you get this result a second time, go to the conclusion.

Stage 2: Steal the Original

Finding an original doesn't do you any good unless you can study it.

You steal or borrow the original without anyone noticing. Make a Stealth or Thievery check against a moderate DC.

Success by 5 or more: You slip away with the original. No one notices it is missing. Go to stage 3.

Success: You slip away with the original. The owner learns it is missing after 2d10 + 2 days. If you don't use the copy before then, the forgery fails. Go to stage 3.

Failure: You slip away with the original. The owner learns it is missing after 1d6 + 2 days. If you don't use the copy before then, the forgery fails. Go to stage 3.

Failure by 5 or more: Circumstances thwarted your effort to acquire the original. You can retry the skill check at a –5 penalty. If you get this result a second time, go to the conclusion.

Stage 3: Prepare Materials

After examining the original, you construct a short list of materials you need to create a good forgery.

You gather and prepare your materials. Make an Arcana, History, or Nature check against a moderate DC. If you are trained in Streetwise, you gain a +2 bonus to this check.

Success by 5 or more: You find materials of the highest quality. You gain a +2 bonus to the Thievery check during the next stage. Go to stage 4.

Success: You find what you need. Go to stage 4.

Failure: You find most of what you need. You take a –2 penalty to the Thievery check during the next stage. Go to stage 4.

Failure by 5 or more: You find very little of what you need. You take a –5 penalty to the Thievery check during the next stage. Go to stage 4.

Stage 4: Create the Forgery

You labor over your creation to produce as close a copy as you can.

You create the forgery. Make a Thievery check against a moderate DC.

Success or Failure: You create the forgery. Go to the conclusion.

Conclusion

To identify the document as a forgery, another creature must make a Perception check against a DC equal to your Thievery check result from stage 4.

Infiltrate a Guarded Location

You slip into a guarded location to make off with an important clue.

There are places off limits even to adventurers. The prison beneath the duke's palace, a powerful merchant's vault, a wizard's secret laboratory—all these and more are places both guarded and secure. If what you seek lies within such a place, you must use all your skills to get in and out before anyone notices.

Achievement (Information): You infiltrate a guarded location to discover its secrets. With a success, you slip in, learn what you need, and slip out again without arousing suspicion.

Time: 1 day

Stage 1: Scope Out the Location

You stake out the location to find a way inside.

Knowing the location can make your job all the easier. You examine the site, watching for guard movements and searching out access points. Make a Perception check against a moderate DC.

Success by 5 or more: You find a gap in the location's defenses. You gain a +2 bonus to the skill check during the next stage. Go to stage 2.

Success: You find a way in. Go to stage 2.

Failure: You find a way in, but it will be tough. You take a –2 penalty to the skill check during the next stage. Go to stage 2.

Failure by 5 or more: While you are looking for a way in, a guard notices you. Make a Bluff check against a moderate DC. If you succeed, go to stage 2. If you fail, go to the conclusion.

Stage 2: Get Inside

Having scoped out the location, it's time to break in.

You slip into the location. You might have to climb over a wall, wriggle through a tight place, or break down a door. Make an Acrobatics, Athletics, or Thievery check against a moderate DC.

Success by 5 or more: You get inside without attracting any attention. You gain a +2 bonus to all skill checks for the duration of the challenge. Go to stage 3.

Success: You get inside. Go to stage 3.

Failure: You make it inside, but you cause too much noise in doing so. You take a –2 penalty to all skill checks for the duration of the challenge. Go to stage 3.

Failure by 5 or more: While trying to get inside, you encounter some guards. Make a Bluff or Stealth check against a hard DC. If you succeed, go to stage 3. If you fail, go to the conclusion.

Stage 3: Overcome Obstacle

While navigating the location, you encounter a tough obstacle.

A locked door, trap, or some other obstacle blocks your progress. Make an Athletics or Thievery check against a moderate DC.

Success by 5 or more: You bypass the obstacle without making a sound. Go to stage 5.

Success: You overcome the obstacle. Proceed to stage 4.

Failure: You make too much noise getting through the obstacle. You take a –2 penalty to the skill check in stage 4. Go to stage 4.

Failure by 5 or more: You must find another way. Make a Dungeoneering or Perception check against a hard DC. If you succeed, go stage 4. If you fail, go to the conclusion.

Stage 4: Evade Guards

A guard patrol comes your way!

You must hide, or else talk your way past the guards. Make a Bluff, Intimidate, or Stealth check against a moderate DC.

Success by 5 or more: You maneuver past the guards without trouble. You gain a +2 bonus to all skill checks for the duration of the challenge. Go to stage 5.

Success: You find a way around or through the guards. Go to stage 5.

Failure: The guards are suspicious. You take a –2 penalty to all skill checks for the duration of the challenge. Go to stage 4.

Failure by 5 or more: The guards spot you or don't buy your story. Go to the conclusion.

Stage 5: Find Information

You search for the information you need.

You reach the location or the person with the information. Make a Bluff, Diplomacy, or Perception check against a moderate DC.

Success by 5 or more: You gain the information so quickly the guards don't have time to react. Go to the conclusion.

Success: You get the information. Go to stage 6.

Failure: While you are taking the information, the guards arrive. Make a Bluff or Stealth check against a moderate DC. If you succeed, go to stage 6. If you fail, go to the conclusion.

Failure by 5 or more: The guards find you. Make a Bluff or Stealth check against a hard DC. If you succeed, go to stage 6. If you fail, go to the conclusion.

Stage 6: Escape Undetected

You slip away before anyone notices you were there. Or at least you hope to.

You retrace your steps to escape. Make a Dungeoneering check against a moderate DC.

Success: You escape. Go to the conclusion.

Failure: You get lost. Make a Perception check against a moderate DC. If you succeed, you escape. Go to the conclusion. If you fail, the guards drag you. Go to the conclusion.

Failure by 5 or more: You stumble into the guards who carry you. Go to the conclusion.

Conclusion

How well you navigated the location determines your success.

If you reached the conclusion from a success, you gained the information you sought.

If you reached this conclusion from a failure before getting the information, you don't get it, and you are tossed out.

If you reached the conclusion from a failure after getting the information, you are beaten, questioned, and beaten some more before you escape.

Hunt Wild Game

You creep through the wild, searching for your prey.

When foraging isn't enough to keep you and your allies fed, you can always turn to hunting game to put food in your bellies. Hunting requires patience, a keen eye, and a familiarity with the wilderness.

Achievement (Material): You stalk game in the wild. If you succeed, you gain food enough to feed you and up to five allies for 1d4 days.

Time: 6 hours

Stage 1: Choose a Site

Using your experience as a hunter, you choose a likely site to hunt your prey.

You recall information about where game might be found. Make a Nature check against an easy DC. Use Dungeoneering if you're in an underground location.

Success by 5 or more: You know an excellent site. You gain a +2 bonus to the Perception check during the next stage. Go to stage 2.

Success: You know a serviceable site. Go to stage 2.

Failure: You go to a site. There's not a lot of game. You take a –2 penalty to the Perception check during the next stage. Go to stage 2.

Failure by 5 or more: While headed to a good site, you come across a monster. Make an Intimidate or Stealth check against a moderate DC. If you succeed, go to stage 2. If you fail, you are attacked. Go to the conclusion.

Stage 2: Find Tracks

You search for tracks in the underbrush.

You scour the terrain for tracks to follow your prey. Make a Perception check against a moderate DC.

Success by 5 or more: You find fresh tracks. You gain a +2 bonus to the Perception check during the next stage. Go to stage 3.

Success: You find tracks. Go to stage 3.

Failure: You find faint tracks. You take a –2 penalty to the Perception check during the next stage. Go to stage 3.

Failure by 5 or more: You find old and faint tracks. You take a –5 penalty to the Perception check during the next stage. Go to stage 3.

Stage 3: Stalk Your Prey

You follow the tracks to make the kill.

The tracks lead into the wild. Make a Perception check against a moderate DC. If you are trained in Nature, you gain a +2 bonus to this check.

Success by 5 or more: You come upon the beast while it's grazing. You gain a +2 bonus to the attack roll during the next stage. Go to stage 4.

Success: You find the beast. Go to stage 4.

Failure: You see the beast, but you startle it. You take a –2 penalty to the attack roll during the next stage. Go to stage 4.

Failure by 5 or more: You lose the trail. Go back to stage 2. If you get this result a second time, go to the conclusion.

Stage 4: Take the Shot

You fix the target in your sights and take the shot.

You make an attack to bring down the beast. Make a ranged basic attack against an AC equal to 14 + your level.

Hit by 5 or more: You fell the beast in a single shot. Go to the conclusion.

Hit: You hit the beast, but it runs off. Make a Perception check against an easy DC. If you succeed, you

find the carcass. If you fail, you don't find the carcass. Go to the conclusion.

Miss: You nick the beast. Make another attack roll at a –2 penalty. If you hit, you drop the beast. If you miss, the beast gets away. Go to the conclusion.

Miss by 5 or more: You miss completely and the beast runs off. Go to the conclusion.

Conclusion

Your hunting expedition is done—will you go hungry or not?

If you reached the conclusion from a hit, you provide food for yourself and up to five allies for 3 days.

If you reached the conclusion from a failure or a miss, you don't make a kill. You can try again the next day.

Join a Thieves' Guild

The thieves' guild is one of the most connected and powerful underworld agencies in the city.

A thieves' guild is a criminal organization made up of thieves, robbers, and cutpurses. The guild exists for its members' mutual protection and to ensure everyone involved gets a fair take. The guild master determines who gets robbed and who doesn't, manages the operations, and keeps order . . . of a sort.

Achievement (Association): Joining a thieves' guild gives you access to an influential underworld organization. You gain a +2 bonus to Streetwise checks in any community where the guild operates.

Time: 3 days

Stage 1: Make Contact

The thieves' guild doesn't let just anyone inside its circle. You must first make contact with a member.

You ask questions and snoop around to find a guild member. Make a Streetwise check against a moderate DC. If you have training in Thievery, you gain a +2 bonus to this check.

Success by 5 or more: You've impressed someone in the guild and encounter someone friendly. You get a +2 bonus to the skill check during the next stage. Go to stage 2.

Success: You encounter a guild member. Go to stage 2.

Failure: Your questions attract attention from the wrong sorts. A guild member finds you but is unfriendly. You take a –2 penalty to the skill check during the next stage. Go to stage 2.

Failure by 5 or more: Your snooping leads you to an encounter with a hostile guild member. You take a –5 penalty to the skill check during the next stage. Go to stage 2.

Stage 2: Get an Audience

The guild agent is your portal to the guild master and membership.

You must convince the guild member to take you to the guild master. Make a Bluff, Diplomacy, or Intimidate check against a moderate DC.

Success by 5 or more: The guild member is impressed and vouches for you. You gain a +2 bonus to the skill check during the next stage. Go to stage 3.

Success: The guild member agrees to take you to the guild master. Go to stage 3.

Failure: The guild member will take you to the guild master only if you pay a bribe. The bribe must be 10 gp per level in the heroic tier, 100 gp per level in the paragon tier, or 1,000 gp per level in the epic tier. If you pay the bribe, go to stage 3. If you don't, go to the conclusion.

Failure by 5 or more: The guild member refuses you. Go to the conclusion.

Stage 3: Impress the Guild Master

You stand before the shadowy master and ask to join the guild.

The guild master interviews you. How you acquit yourself determines whether you will be allowed to join. Make a Bluff or Diplomacy check against a hard DC.

Success by 5 or more: The guild master accepts you into the organization. Go to the conclusion.

Success: The guild master will accept you if you pass a test. Go to stage 4.

Failure: The guild master will accept you if you pass a tough test. You take a –2 penalty to the Thievery check during the next stage. Go to stage 4.

Failure by 5 or more: The guild master will accept you if you pass an impossible test. You take a –5 penalty to the Thievery check during the next stage. Go to stage 4.

Stage 4: Prove Your Stuff

You burgle a merchant's house, pick a constable's pocket, or snatch a jewel from the noble, all to prove your worth.

You must perform a crime to prove yourself. Make a Thievery check against a moderate DC. If you're trained in Bluff, you gain a +2 bonus to the check. If you're trained in Stealth, you gain a +2 bonus to the check.

Success: You impress the guild master. Go to the conclusion.

Failure: Your effort fails. Go to the conclusion.

Failure by 5 or more: Not only do you fail, but you are arrested.

Conclusion

Membership in the guild is yours, provided you impressed the master.

If you reached the conclusion from a success, you are a full member of the thieves' guild.

If you reached the conclusion from a failure, you are denied entry into the guild. You can try again when you gain a level.

Research in a Library

You scour a library for the information you seek.

In this dark age, books are rare. They are expensive to produce, hard to find, and costly to maintain. For these reasons, libraries are few and secure. Most libraries are cluttered with scrolls and manuscripts, disorganized and hard to navigate. Using a library to find information related to your subject is a challenge in itself.

Achievement (Information): You convince the librarian to grant you access to his or her repository, and you then scour the stacks to find relevant information. If you succeed, you gain a clue related to the problem you hope to overcome.

Time: 8 hours

Stage 1: Access the Library

Not just anyone can access a library.

You must convince the librarian to let you explore the library. Make a Bluff, Diplomacy, or Intimidate check against a moderate DC.

Success by 5 or more: The librarian lets you in and offers to help. You gain a +2 bonus to all skill checks for the duration of the challenge. Go to stage 2.

Success: The librarian grants you access to the library. Go to stage 2.

Failure: The librarian denies you access to the library. You can sneak in by making a Stealth check against an easy DC. If you succeed, go to stage 2. If you fail, go to the conclusion.

Failure by 5 or more: The librarian refuses you entry and is suspicious. You can sneak in by making a Stealth check against a moderate DC. If you succeed, go to stage 2. If you fail, go to the conclusion.

Stage 2: Search the Library

You hunt through the mess to find the books you need.

The library's disorder makes it hard to find anything you need. Make a Perception check against a moderate DC.

Success by 5 or more: You find materials valuable to your research. You gain a +2 bonus to all skill checks for the duration of the challenge. Go to stage 3.

Success: You find useful materials. Go to stage 3.

Failure: You find materials that might be useful. You take a –2 penalty to the skill check during the next stage. Go to stage 3.

Failure by 5 or more: The information you find is dubious at best. You take a –5 penalty to the skill check during the next stage. Go to stage 3.

Stage 3: Study the Texts

You cross-reference the texts to find the clues you seek.

You examine the texts. Make a knowledge check related to the subject you are researching against a moderate DC.

Success: You find a clue. Go to the conclusion.

Failure: You find little of use. Go to the conclusion.

Conclusion

After spending hours in the library, you might have uncovered the information you need.

If you reached the conclusion from a success, you gain information about the subject matter you chose to research.

If you reached the conclusion from a failure, you learn nothing useful.

Track a Character

You know your quarry hides somewhere in the city.

Sometimes surreptitious investigation is more useful than a direct approach. You might suspect a character of some malfeasance, or maybe you think the character knows something or someone important, so you track down the character to learn what you can.

Achievement (Information): A success gives you information about where the character is hiding or what he or she is up to.

Time: 6 hours

Stage 1: Gather Intelligence

You hit the streets, looking for signs of your quarry.

You scour the city for the character you seek. Make a Streetwise check against a moderate DC.

Success by 5 or more: You find a reliable witness who reveals where the target was last seen. You gain a +2 bonus to all skill checks for the duration of the challenge. Go to stage 2.

Success: You find a witness who points you in the right direction. Go to stage 2.

Failure: You find an unreliable witness who gives you shaky information. You take a –2 penalty to the next skill check during this challenge. Go to stage 2.

Failure by 5 or more: The witness tells you where to go but tips off your quarry. You take a –2 penalty to all skill checks for the duration of the challenge. Go to stage 2.

Stage 2: Stake Out

You come upon the place where the character was last seen.

Watching the location for your quarry will let you pick up the trail. To avoid notice, you need to find a hiding place. Make a Stealth check against a moderate DC.

Success by 5 or more: You find an excellent hiding place with a clear view of the location. You gain a +2

bonus to the Perception check during the next stage. Go to stage 3.

Success: You find a suitable hiding place. Go to stage 3.

Failure: Your hiding place obstructs your view. You take a –2 penalty to the Perception check during the next stage. Go to stage 3.

Failure by 5 or more: Thugs compromise your hiding place. Make a Bluff or Intimidate check against a hard DC. If you succeed, you take a –2 penalty to the Perception check during the next stage and then go to stage 3. If you fail, the confrontation becomes a scuffle and your quarry slips away. Go to the conclusion.

Stage 3: Listen and Look

You watch the location, looking for any sign of the character.

From your hiding place, you watch for the character. Make a Perception check against a moderate DC.

Success by 5 or more: You hear something or see movement from inside, letting you anticipate the character's exit. You gain a +2 bonus to Stealth checks during the next stage. Go to stage 4.

Success: You see the character emerge. Go to stage 4.

Failure: You are momentarily distracted and the character slips away. Make another Perception check against a moderate DC. On a success, you go to stage 4, but you take a –2 penalty on the Stealth check.

Failure by 5 or more: The character slips away from you. Go to the conclusion.

Stage 4: Follow

You shadow the character to see where he or she goes.

To shadow the character, you must stay out of sight. Make a Stealth check against a moderate DC.

Success by 5 or more: You follow closely enough to see and hear the character. You gain a +2 bonus to the next check during the challenge. Go to stage 5.

Success: You follow the character unseen. Go to stage 5.

Failure: You follow the character but are spotted. The character runs off. If you want to follow, make an Athletics check against a moderate DC. If you succeed, go to stage 5. If you fail or if you don't follow, go to the conclusion.

Failure by 5 or more: The character loses you. Go to the conclusion.

Stage 5: Learn

You catch the character in the act of doing something revealing.

You watch the character to see what he or she is up to. Make an Insight or Perception check against a moderate DC.

Success: You see or hear something important. Go to the conclusion.

Failure: You don't see anything conclusive. Go to the conclusion.

Conclusion

The information you sought is yours depending on how you handled the challenge.

If you reached the conclusion from a success, you learn something that exculpates or damns the character.

If you reached the conclusion from a failure, you might get a hint there's something going on, but you know nothing for certain.

Woo a Character

Whether for romance or for personal gain, you invest time and energy into making a friend.

A connection made today can prove useful to you at some point tomorrow. You might make an honest attempt to befriend another character, or you might seek a romantic involvement. Then again, you could have other motives and look to exploit a character for what he or she can give you.

Achievement (Association): A successful venture wins admiration, respect, adoration, or friendship from another character.

Time: 2 weeks

Stage 1: Get an Introduction

It's often helpful to arrange an introduction when meeting someone new.

We've Met: If you have met the character before, you can skip this stage and proceed to stage 2.

Introductions Required: To aid in your wooing, you ask someone to set up an introduction and vouch for you. Make a Bluff, Diplomacy, or Intimidate check against a moderate DC.

Success by 5 or more: The character is enthusiastic and agrees. You gain a +2 bonus to all skill checks for the duration of the challenge. Go to stage 2.

Success: The character agrees to introduce you. Go to stage 2.

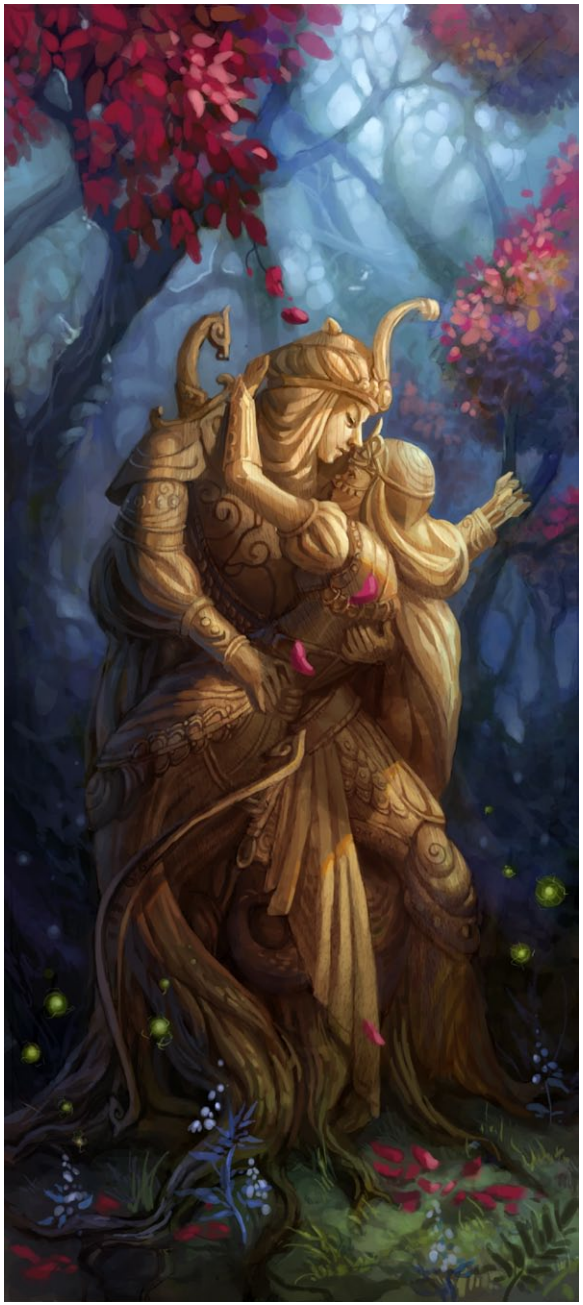
Failure: The character is reluctant to introduce you. Make a second check using a different skill from the one you used to gain this result. If you get this result a second time, the character refuses to introduce you and you take a –2 penalty to all skill checks for the duration of the challenge.

Failure by 5 or more: The character refuses to introduce you and in fact poisons the object of your attention against you. You take a –5 penalty to all skill checks for the duration of the challenge. Go to stage 2 or the conclusion.

Stage 2: Learn about the Character

You ask around to learn more about the character.

You ask around or observe the character to get a sense of how to proceed. Make an Insight or Streetwise check against a moderate DC.



Success by 5 or more: You find out something very helpful. You gain a +2 bonus to all skill checks for the duration of the challenge. Go to stage 3.

Success: You learn something of the character's interests. Go to stage 3.

Failure: You learn false information about the character and take a –2 penalty to the skill check during stage 4. Go to stage 3.

Failure by 5 or more: Your inquiries betray your intent. You take a –2 penalty to all skill checks for the duration of the challenge. Go to stage 3.

Stage 3: Make an Impression

A later meeting gives you a chance to win over the character.

You try to make a good impression. Choose one skill. Make a check using that skill against a hard DC. The DM might suggest a skill based on the character's personality.

Success by 5 or more: You amaze the character. You gain a +2 bonus to your next skill check during this challenge. Go to stage 5.

Success: You make an impression. Go to stage 5.

Failure: Your failed effort is a stumble. You take a –2 penalty to your next skill check during this challenge. Go to stage 5.

Failure by 5 or more: The character misunderstands you in a bad way. Go to the conclusion.

Stage 5: Friendship or Romance

You have one last chance to build this relation.

You make the move to become better acquainted. Make a Bluff or Diplomacy check against a moderate DC.

Success: A relationship is born. Go to the conclusion.

Failure: It's just not going to work. Go to the conclusion.

Conclusion

What is your future with this character?

If you reached the conclusion from a success, the character is helpful and regards you as a trusted friend or more.

If you reached the conclusion from a failure, the character is indifferent or unfriendly depending on how the challenge played out.

About the Author

Robert J. Schwalb has contributed design to or developed nearly two hundred roleplaying game titles for Dungeons & Dragons®, *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay*, *A Song of Ice and Fire RPG*, *Star Wars RPG*, and the d20 system. Some of his more recent work for Wizards of the Coast can be found in *Book of Vile Darkness*™ and *Player's Option: Heroes of the Elemental Chaos*™. He's also a regular contributor to both *Dragon* and *Dungeon* magazines. For more information about the author, be sure to check out his website at www.robertjschwalb.com or follow him on Twitter (@rjschwalb).

FORGOTTEN REALMS®

ED GREENWOOD'S
Eye on the Realms

The Dragon that Never Died

By Ed Greenwood

Illustration by Claudio Pozas

"You look upon the lair of the green dragon Aglaraerose, who lies coiled atop the greatest treasure ever assembled in one place in all Faerûn," the old warrior growled. "Or so they say."

"You doubt that claim?"

The old man shrugged. "Since the man who made it came out of yon hollow mountain, no one else has ever emerged, though thousands have gone in. Nor does the dragon herself ever emerge to feed. That lone survivor is dead now, so no one is left to question, and I am a suspicious man. Is there such a grand treasure? Does the dragon yet live? Where have all those eager treasure-seekers gone? Those are questions for younger fools to seek answers to—yourself, perhaps."

The Fang in the Forest

The southernmost of the Earthfast Mountains, where that range meets the wild, monster-roamed Gray Forest, is a small, conical peak. Either it is an extinct volcano or it shares the shape of one, for it is open at the top and local legend has long deemed it hollow.

The perils of the forest,[1] the remote location, and colorful stories of slithering monsters have kept most folk who aren't adventurers well away from this hollow mountain.

Over the years, the peak has become known as the Fang in the Forest,[2] thanks to legends of the horrible deeds done by the dragon said to lair inside the mountain.[3]

No level-headed person claims to have seen this particular dragon. Stories describe it as having four heads and two tails that end in huge, cottage-crushing maces of bone, or that it is the transformed lost prince of a southern land trapped in dragon form by the spells of a cruel wizard, or that it devoured two intruding dragons after a mighty battle and is now too fat to squeeze out of its mountain lair.[4] When it's finally thin enough to emerge again, they say, it will roar out ravenously hungry and will surely lay waste to Impiltur, Procampur, and probably much of Sembia, too!

TM & © 2013 Wizards of the Coast LLC. All rights reserved.

All that can be said for certain is that stories of dragons have always clung to this small mountain, that no one alive has ever seen a dragon anywhere near the area, and that out of hundreds if not thousands of adventurers who have ventured near the peak, none have been heard from again.

Save, perhaps, one: the adventurer Larl Hammurland, who in 1356 DR emerged from the Gray Forest with a wild tale about speaking with a green dragon as she lay at ease atop a stupendous mountain of treasure. He escaped—or rather, she allowed him to leave—to tell the wider world what he'd seen. Hammurland died in a tavern brawl in 1358 DR. Since then, Aglaraerose has been blamed for the disappearance of several large herds of cattle near Tsurlagol in 1374 DR, but nothing else beyond wild, unsubstantiated tales has been heard of the dragon since.

The nickname "Dragon That Never Died" arose recently among tale-tellers who believe that this dragon has remained vigorous beyond her normal life span. If that's true, then either some magical reason or the luck of a capricious god must account for it.[5]

What Elminster Knows

Until he recently had time enough—and was intrigued enough—to personally pursue investigations into the Fang of the Forest (the results of that investigation follow), Elminster of Shadowdale knew this much about the green dragon Aglaraerose: Some dragons have sought undeath, or had undeath thrust upon them, and become dracoliches. Still others have prolonged their lives by complicated, difficult magical procedures of their own devising. One dragon, the great wyrm Aglaraerose, found a way to steal life from living creatures that venture into her lair, so that they age and she gains vigor.

Aglaraerose was already a young adult or older when she first came to the notice of lorekeepers as a tireless hunter of beasts and brigands in the Nelanther.[6] She has always been easy to recognize among dragons thanks to a characteristic long, irregular patch of dark scales along her underbelly. Scholars believe she was born with this mark and Elminster agrees, though he admits that it looks like a battle scar at first glance.[7]

When Aglaraerose took to snatching sailors off the decks of ships, she tasted her first hostile magic in the form of binding spells that almost drowned her.[8] Thoroughly frightened, she relocated far inland, where she fed on the seemingly endless beasts roaming the Shaar as she slowly made her way toward the East. She disappeared from the chronicles during these wandering years, reappearing centuries later as a predator upon the monsters of the land of Veldorn.[9] While there, she and the infamous red dragon Klauth devoured what would almost certainly have become an orc horde in the mountains known as The Spine of the World, as winter drew nigh in 1339 DR. Her encounter with Klauth came about by pure chance; the two dragons simultaneously descended from the sky to feed on the same herd of behemoths; for reasons known only to them, the two wyrms decided to cooperate rather than fight then and there.

After demolishing the gathering of orcs, Aglaraerose retired to her lair to sleep and digest for decades, emerging again in 1351 DR to snatch up and devour almost everyone in the infamous Lost Caravan of Taeremel near Hardcastle on the Road of Dust trade route.

More recently, feeling her age and seeing the desirability of gaining a continuing flow of sustenance without the peril of hunting, Aglaraerose cornered a band of dwarf adventurers and then hired them (forcibly at first, but they were paid well for the indignity and allowed to depart alive when their work was done) to build her a trap-filled stage lair, the Lure of Jaws.[10]

The dwarves performed a further service to Aglaraerose, freely and without even realizing they were doing her will: In every town and tavern they visited, they spread their tale of the enormous dragon hoard that was but lightly defended by mock traps and a single, sleepy dragon. These rumors have had the desired effect of drawing an ever-increasing stream of adventuring bands to the Gray Forest. They come dreaming of riches and are never heard from again.[11]

The tales have grown ever wilder, but at their heart they are all similar. Somewhere on the lower flanks of the Fang, a great open gateway has been tunneled out of the stone. It leads to room after lofty-ceilinged room, in a chain of great chambers that curves within the hollow, stony heart of the mountain. Each room contains a guardian statue that booms its challenge at intruders. By answering a riddle correctly, intruders win their way onward, nearer to the fabled riches. The dragon who once ruled this mountain and reclined atop these treasures has either died or moved on to some other existence. It persists only as a ghostly voice and an unsettling presence, but any real danger is long past.

The Lure of Jaws

The truth, as pieced together by Elminster (after interviewing some of the dwarves who built the lair and briefly visiting it himself in nigh-impervious gaseous form), is that Aglaraerose is very much alive and present in the mountain. She dwells in a long cavern beneath the chain of rooms. Through speaking tubes from that lower cavern, she speaks for the statues, bandying words with intruders in an attempt to sway them into going to spots in specific rooms and performing actions that will drop them individually through cleverly concealed trap doors.

Many of the traps have jaws with metal fangs that cruelly stab anything that disturbs the trigger before springing open again. The wounded victim then slides down a chute before plunging a final thirty feet to the floor of the dragon's cavern.

Since no single person presents much danger to a creature such as Aglaraerose, she can toy with one

captive at a time until she tires of that victim. When the game grows stale, she smashes her prisoner with her tail or swallows it whole and proceeds to trapping the next.

Three prisoners have been kept alive, on sufferance, as slaves tasked with oiling and maintaining the traps.

Aglaraerose the Ambitious

That Aglaraerose still devours her victims bodily is chiefly the result of habit and cruelty. Elminster determined, through difficult and dangerous research, that the Dragon That Never Died no longer needs to eat to survive; she can absorb the life force directly from nearby living creatures.

The dragon gained this astounding ability when she captured the renegade Thayan wizard Zeltrar Oolaph, who had mastered advanced life drain magic that allowed him to steal the life energy of nearby mammals—and swallowed him alive.

Somehow, Oolaph lives on within her, probably comatose and inextricably linked to the veins and arteries of the dragon, involuntarily sharing his life drain ability with Aglaraerose.

In life, Oolaph could unleash his life drain against specific, nearby targets. Now in his unconscious state, the power is always active. It does not drain either Oolaph or his draconic host, but it affects everyone who gets too close to the increasingly torpid Aglaraerose. Victims become weak and weary, sapped of life energy with frightening speed.

According to Elminster, a good way to slay the dragon would be for dragonslayers to equip themselves with teleportation or a similar means of rapid relocation, along with plenty of lethal battle spells. Then the hopeful dragonslayers should drop into her cavern as far from the beast as possible, blast her from a distance with spells, and zip away to a far corner of the cavern whenever she draws threateningly close.

Even better, in the great mage's opinion, would be for everyone to stay far away from the Fang in the Forest and leave the dragon alone. Deprived of lives to feed upon, she would either grow weak and die or be forced to emerge and attack in the open as she once did, making her vulnerable to the many powerful inhabitants of the Realms.

If the dragon's ravings to her slaves can be believed, Aglaraerose still possesses her huge heap of treasure, but she no longer seeks anything more than occasional trophies from vanquished foes. She talks much about becoming a self-styled "Harvester of Lives," deciding which creatures in Faerûn are worthy of continued existence and which shall have their life energy leeched from them. Those who please or obey Aglaraerose shall flourish, and those who defy or displease her shall perish.

To put these psychotic ambitions into motion, Elminster points out, the Dragon That Never Died must either emerge from her hollow mountain to travel the land or set to work tunneling so as to emerge into the wider Underdark and use it as a highway. Having heard the dragon's ravings, Elminster is now watching to see where her decisions take her.

He advises folk of the Realms to glance at the sky often, just in case.

About the Author

Ed Greenwood is the man who unleashed the Forgotten Realms® setting on an unsuspecting world. He works in libraries, plus he writes fantasy, science fiction, horror, mystery, and romance stories (sometimes all in the same novel), but he is happiest when churning out Realmslore, Realmslore, and more Realmslore. He still has a few rooms in his house in which he has space left to pile up papers.

Notes

i) Notably, these dangers include some howling hags and the owlbears they reared and trained to attack intruders, not to mention other prowling forest predators. Several areas within the forest have trees and undergrowth that are incredibly thick and tangled, and these areas are not made any safer by old, overgrown pit traps dug long ago by bear hunters.

ii) On the oldest maps, this small, conical, hollow-hearted mountain is called Daerlo's Rest, after a local forester named Ulth Daerlo. The forester's companions buried him here after he bled to death from a gore wound inflicted upon him by a boar he had been hunting.

iii) These include lurid and persistent local tales of the dragon capturing and mating with humans, producing horrible, misshapen, scaled offspring that it sends forth at night to snatch dogs, children, and even babies that it devours whole. Variants of these tales claim that local rulers, innkeepers, and other unpopular local figures are secretly the dragon's offspring and are in league with her.

iv) Another tale claims the dragon's body has wasted away, but its floating, mighty-jawed head remains, flying across the Realms by night and pouncing on the unwary to rend them in midflight. A competing fireside yarn insists the dragon kidnaps people and breeds them selectively like livestock, rearing and training their offspring to build a strain of humans that are fanatically loyal to it. These fanatics will one day infiltrate and conquer a land of the dragon's choosing to found its kingdom.

v) These words were written by Ahrmakoacz, "the Sage of Dragons" of Athkatla. They are part of an unfinished essay found among his papers after his recent, mysterious disappearance.

vi) This is the great arc of so-called Pirate Isles lying west of the coasts of Amn and Tethyr, in the Sea of Swords. Hundreds of named islands and islets are in the Nelanther, and thousands more

unnamed, smaller rocks dot this chain. They are the haunt of pirates, outlaws, and mages desiring privacy. The seabirds and seals of the outermost islands blacken the sky and the land with their numbers, providing abundant food for dragons and other large, hungry predators.

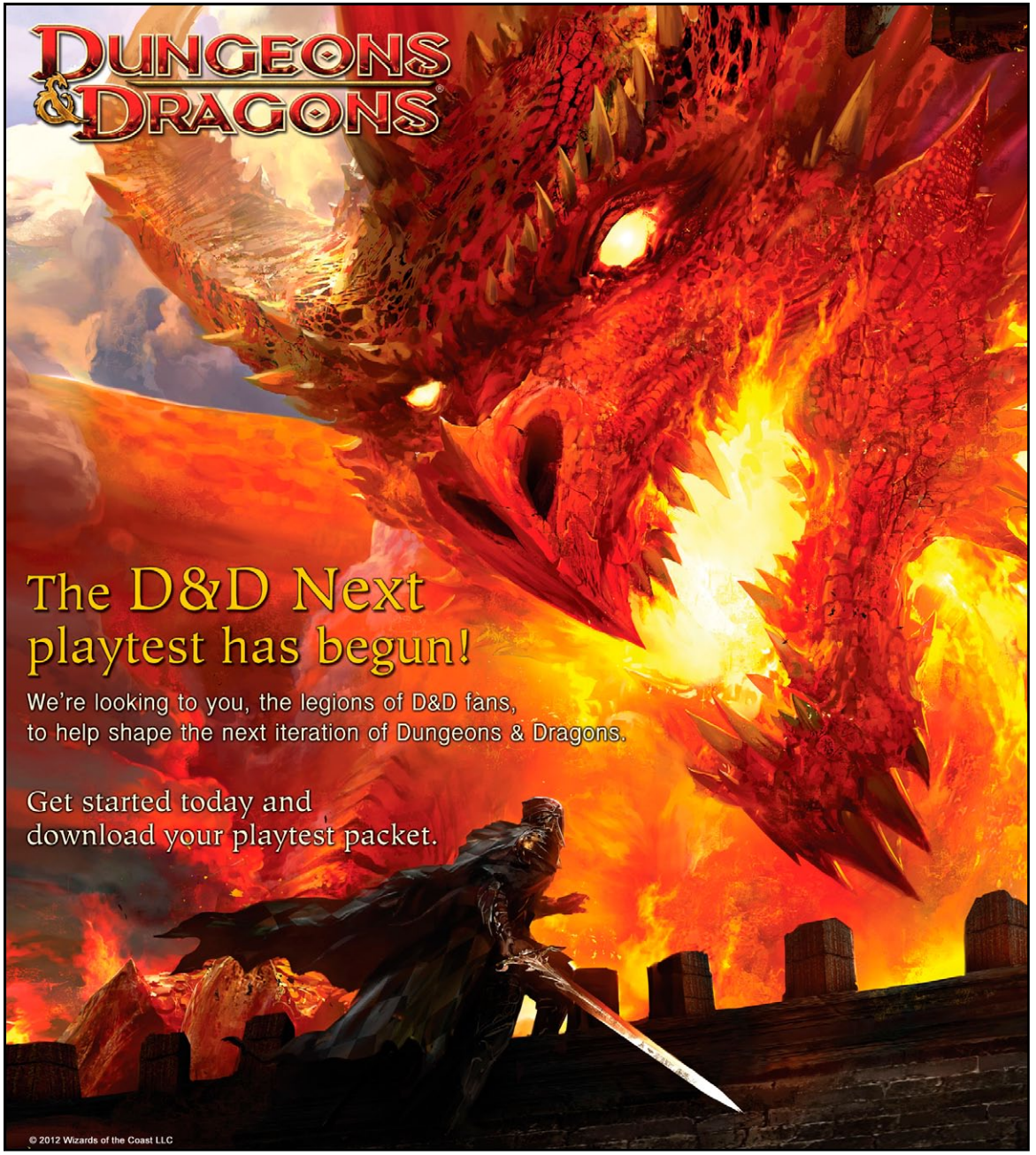
vii) According to Elminster, this marking is a many-branched shape that readers of English might describe as a capital letter Z linked to another capital Z by an elongated capital S, that crosses over the horizontal top of one Z and the bottom of the other Z.

viii) This close escape for Aglaraerose occurred in the summer of 349 DR and almost certainly involved an encounter with hired wizards aboard a trading ship faring north along the Sword Coast from a port on the Shining Sea.

ix) There were numerous sightings in Veldorn and adjoining lands in 1249–1254 DR, recorded in such sources as *Emmer's Book of the Passing Years* (Emmer of Tharsult, 1272 DR) and *The Testament of Ontal* (Ontal, Servant of Oghma, 1278 DR).

x) Norold's Nine Axes was led by Norold Foehammer. This unchartered band consists of nine misfit dwarves from eight clans (there are two Foehammers in the band: Norold and his cousin Argult) who spent their early seasons exploring the surface caves, upper caverns, and mines of the Earthfast Mountains, most of which had been abandoned to various monsters.

xi) This roster of the vanished (and presumably fallen) includes Berefast's Bold and Brave of Sapra, the Many Bright Teeth from Ormpetarr, and Ozra's Triumphants of Milvarune. Some believe even the Hargul's Swords mercenary company fell prey to the Dragon that Never Died.


DUNGEONS & DRAGONS
The D&D Next playtest has begun!
We're looking to you, the legions of D&D fans, to help shape the next iteration of Dungeons & Dragons.
Get started today and download your playtest packet.
© 2012 Wizards of the Coast LLC

COMING NEXT MONTH

THE ANATOMY OF ELEMENTAL EVIL

By Thomas Reid

What is the essence of Elemental Evil? How did something so basic and fundamental as element-worship become twisted into the insidious cult made famous by its iconic temple? What is the relationship between Zuggtmoy, Iuz, Tharizdun, and Lolth? We deftly slice this Gordion knot so anyone can understand the dark, twisted force that is Elemental Evil.

HISTORY CHECK: THE TEMPLE OF ELEMENTAL EVIL

By Skip Williams

The Temple of Elemental Evil, a deliciously infamous place, looms large in the memories of thousands of roleplayers. Legions of heroic alter egos began their careers on the dusty streets of Hommlet and persevered until they had plumbed the mysteries of the last accursed elemental node in the temple's forbidden depths. The temple's rise and fall are fully documented here for the first time.

BESTIARY: CATASTROPHIC DRAGONS, PART 2

By Jennifer Clarke Wilkes and Robert J. Schwalb

Chromatic and metallic dragons are the stuff of legend throughout all lands and cultures. Even the common folk are familiar with these legendary creatures. Only the most seasoned adventurers know of the catastrophic dragons—and those who know these creatures quickly learn to fear them. In July, we meet the whirlwind dragon and the wildfire dragon.

UNEARTHED ARCANA: COMBAT OPTIONS

By Robert J. Schwalb and Matt Sernett

This installment of *Unearthed Arcana* presents optional rules for combat to help you fine-tune the way your group plays. These options run the gamut from classic concepts like critical fumbles to elements from previous editions like disarming attacks to wild ideas like rolling defenses instead of attacks.

AND MORE!

D&D®